

**Content Usage: An In-Depth Look at How Agriculture and Food Companies Plan
and Evaluate Content**

Theresa N. Reps

July 24, 2017

University of Minnesota

School of Journalism and Mass Communication

Professional M.A. in Strategic Communication Capstone

Table of Contents

ABOUT THE AUTHOR.....	3
ABSTRACT.....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	6
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
RESEARCH QUESTION.....	12
METHOD.....	13
FINDINGS.....	14
STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS.....	24
FUTURE RESEARCH.....	33
CLOSING THOUGHTS.....	34
REFERENCES.....	35
APPENDICEES.....	40
APPENDIX A- INTERVIEW GUIDES.....	40
APPENDIX B – INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS.....	43

About the Author

Theresa Reps is a graduate student from the Strategic Communications Masters of Arts Program, at the University of Minnesota. She also received her undergraduate degree from the University of Minnesota in agricultural education, leadership and communications. She began her career as the Director of Communications and Marketing for the Minnesota Pork Producers Association. Theresa now currently works as an Integrated Communications Manager for the Midwest Dairy Association where she is in charge of digital on-farm content strategy.

Growing up on her family's dairy farm, Theresa developed a love for agriculture. She enjoys spending time working on the family farm and attending cow shows in her spare time. Theresa's passion for agriculture and communications provides a unique perspective to content strategy. She hopes to continue to develop and lead content strategy efforts in hopes of sharing dairy farmers' stories with consumers.

Abstract

The objective of this study is to explore how agriculture and food companies address content planning, strategy and evaluation. Consumers are seeking more information than ever and they are looking to food and agriculture companies to provide more transparency about how their food is produced (The Center for Food Integrity, 2015). Content strategy is a tool that companies can use to address those concerns and build brand loyalty.

To take an in-depth look at how agriculture and food companies are using content, expert interviews were conducted with 11 communications experts from agriculture and food companies around the Midwest. The companies varied from four employees to a Fortune 100 business. The interviews were conducted by phone and occurred from May 24, 2017 to July 13, 2017. A follow-up survey was sent to each participant that asked more demographic-type questions to free up time during the interview.

The findings indicated some common challenges that each of the organizations faced around strategy, planning and evaluation. Content strategy had three challenges that were common, relevancy to each audience, principles of journalism and multiple-use content. When it came to planning, there were no consistencies for how organizations planned their content except for the fact that those selling products tended to align their content calendars with their sales calendars. Evaluation of content focused primarily on outputs like reach and not outcomes like behavioral or attitude changes.

To address the challenges of strategy, planning and evaluation, I recommend the following. To create focus groups that can address how to be relevant to each audience

and provide a way to look at the outcome of content rather than just the outputs. To incorporate the principles of journalism into content creation to develop trust. To develop or clearly define the companies' brand voice to help easily use content across platforms. Finally, implement the R.O.P.E (research, objectives, programming, evaluation) method to help plan valuable content. This study ends with final thoughts and future research opportunities for content strategy in agriculture.

Introduction

At the start of the 20th century almost 40 percent of the population was involved in production agriculture and most food was grown on a diversified farm. Fast forward 116 years and farming looks much different; less than two percent of the population is involved in production agriculture and farms are larger and more specialized (Kassel, 2016). Most of today's consumers are three generations removed from the farm which has caused an increase in skepticism about how food is raised. Consumers have many questions about where their food comes from and are actively seeking information to make them feel good about their food choices.

The Center for Food Integrity conducted a consumer trust study and found that consumers look to food manufacturers to provide transparency in all aspects of food production including, impact of food on health, food safety, environmental impact, labor and human rights, animal well-being and business ethics (2015). Agriculture and food companies need to find a way to provide the information that their customer is seeking, in a way that is credible and trustworthy.

According to Google Trends, one of the fastest growing search terms in business marketing is content marketing (Pulizzi, 2012). Content marketing is one way that agriculture and food companies can address their audiences' need for more transparency. According to the Content Marketing Institute, content marketing is defined as a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience (2017). This paper will take an in-depth look at how agriculture and food companies use, plan and evaluate the use of content in their efforts to address consumer concerns and build

trust. Strategic recommendations will be provided in each area to address insights into content strategy.

Literature Review

Content isn't a new concept; the use of content has been around for generations. The idea of developing a content strategy or using content marketing to build brand trust and transparency is relatively new and still understudied. Much research has been done around public relations planning and evaluation however there is still need for specific research related to content strategy as agricultural businesses work to develop content that increases trust and loyalty.

There are varying definitions for content marketing. For the purpose of this paper I will use Kirk Hallahan's definition; content marketing is creating or curating useful information or entertainment fare to engage users. (2014). Rosenbaum provides additional context by stating:

"Content marketing includes the creation of original material of interest to audiences, the repurposing of historic and previously published materials, and the curation of informative, education or entertaining materials from third-party sources where the marketer is not necessarily the source (2011).

Hallahan argues that content marketing is a broad term that can encompass brand journalism, native advertising and promoted user endorsements (2014). This study will focus mostly on the brand journalism aspect of content marketing.

Brand journalism uses journalistic storytelling skills to engage the audience (Pulizzi, 2012). In a study on agricultural communications, experts in the field

recommended storytelling as a way to bridge the gap between the public and agriculture. The focus should be on relating to feelings and incorporating human interest with education, instead of just focusing on facts (Kurtzo, Hansen, Rucker & Edgar, 2016).

Content Strategy and Planning Processes

The Uses and Gratifications Theory developed in 1974 by Katz, Gurevitch and Haas, shifted the focus from how the media affects its audience to how the audience uses the media to satisfy their needs. Katz determined there are five needs that the audience uses the media to satisfy, to be informed or educated, to identify with characters in the situation, entertainment, social interaction and to escape from the stress of daily life. Content marketing employs the Uses and Gratifications Theory to develop content that is valuable and engages a clearly defined target audience (Pulizzi, 2014 & Ahmad, Musa & Harun, 2015). The Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a basis of understanding the audience's needs. Understanding what the audience uses media for is a way to develop engaging content.

Meyers, Gracey, Irlebeck and Akers explored the uses and gratifications of agricultural blog readers to better understand why people read agriculture blogs and how that can impact the way bloggers shape their content. They discovered that the strongest motivation for accessing agricultural blogs was to find out what other people think about important issues and to find alternatives not covered by traditional news sources. They concluded that more research could be done to further examine the readers' uses and gratifications so that agricultural bloggers can reach beyond the agricultural industry (2015).

A study of agricultural communication experts concluded that the concept of understanding the audience or knowing the audience was important to developing and delivering messages. Agricultural communication professionals must understand who the audience is, how they operate and the best ways to reach them. This will help in creating better content that will increase agricultural literacy (Kurtzo, Hansen, Rucker & Edgar, 2016).

Kirk Hallahan from Colorado State University concluded that if brands put customers first to establish relevancy in their content, they will be successful (2014). A similar study showed that identifying the type of content that enhances the interest of the target audiences is important to remaining relevant to customers (Chauhan & Pillai, 2013). Howard White concluded that the smaller the processing effort required to drive desired effects, the greater the relevance (2010).

Margot Bloomstein discussed storytelling as a way to describe the creation of compelling and organic content (2013). Cole and Greer also concluded that framing a custom magazine as editorial can positively affect a reader's perceptions of a brand (2013). Good content evolves from good strategy. Brands need to provide consistent quality content to be successful (Likely & Watson, 2013).

There are four models of communication and public relations practices that are recognized. The two-way symmetrical model establishes a two-way communication between organizations and their key audiences or stakeholders. This model serves as a "win-win" for both the audience and the organization and requires a deep understanding of the needs of each audience (Dozier, L.Grunig & J. Grunig). As Hallahan discovered,

brands that put their audiences first when it comes to content, are more successful (2014).

A two-way dialogue is important to developing relationships and relating to audiences. As evidenced by a study conducted by Briones, Kuch, Liu and Jin took a look at how the American Red Cross used social media to build relationships. The study showed that social media was an effective tool for developing communities around the different audiences that the American Red Cross was trying to reach. The two-way dialogue developed through various social and digital channels helped the American Red Cross develop trust among their volunteers and the communities they serve (2010).

Rumble, Settle and Irani conducted a study of websites that assessed the content of online agricultural awareness campaigns. They concluded that most agriculture websites have content with logical appeals that outweighed the emotional appeal (2014). The study by Kurtzo, Hansen, Rucker and Edgar also showed that experts in agricultural communication need to focus more on storytelling and less on the facts to better connect with consumers (2016).

Evaluation

Much research has been done on measurement and evaluation regarding public relations efforts. Despite all of the research, there has yet to be universal adoption of a method. Every public relations practitioner is looking for a silver-bullet that will help describe the impact public relations efforts have (Buhmann & Likely; Macnamara; Watson, Noble & Page). Research on evaluating the effectiveness of public relations

efforts date back to 1977 (Buhmann & Likely). Likely, Rockland and Weiner worked to find methods that would describe the return on investment for media relations. The four models included, Return on Impressions Model, Return on Media Impact Model, Return on Target Influence model and Return on Earned Media Model. Each of these models presented some negatives and some positives, yet none of them have been widely adopted. Watson disagrees with the idea of ROI,

“We also agree that the financial metric ROI is not appropriate in the measurement of communication campaign effects” (2013, pg 156, p. 3).

The need for standard measurement in evaluation led to the creation of the Barcelona Principles in 2010:

- Goal setting and measurement are fundamental aspects of any public relations program;
- Measuring the effects on outcomes is preferred to measuring outputs;
- The effect on business results should be measured where possible;
- Media measurement requires quantity and quality;
- Advertising value equivalents (AVEs) are not the value of public relations;
- Social media can and should be measured;
- Transparency and replicability are paramount to sound measurement (Institute for Public Relations, 2010)

The second principle of the Barcelona Principles is one that is mentioned frequently in the research. The idea of outputs versus outcomes. Outputs are things like the number of impressions or website visits and outcomes are the actual attitude and behavior changes. Many mistake one for the other. Watson, Noble and Page discussed

that it requires a mix of techniques to successfully measure public relations efforts and one of the most common errors is substituting between levels, like outcomes versus outputs (2008).

“We need our communication measurement to look forward rather than backward, to focus on outcomes and effects, rather than quantifying mere output,” (Andre Manning, VP and Global Head of Corporate Communications, Royal Philips Electronics).

Watson reviewed a series of case studies to see how companies are successfully measuring their campaigns. All of the case studies have a common theme in surveying their audience both before and after to help measure effects (2005). All of the research that has currently been done on measurement and evaluation focuses on public relations efforts as a whole, not content specifically.

Research Question

Much of the past research that has been done regarding strategy, planning and evaluation focuses on public relations as a whole. Content marketing is a newer trend and more research is needed to develop strong content strategies, planning processes and evaluation, especially for agriculture and food companies who might be facing different consumer pressures with the increase skepticism towards food and agriculture.

This study will take an in-depth look at how agriculture and food companies are planning, evaluating and developing content strategies.

Research Question: What types of evaluation, content strategies and planning processes are food and agricultural companies using as compared to other organizations?

Based on past research regarding strategy, planning and evaluation, I present the following hypotheses:

H1.) Content strategy for agriculture and food companies will focus on determining what their audiences' needs are.

H2.) Agriculture and food companies will rely heavily on outputs rather than outcomes to determine the success of their content.

H3.) Agriculture and food companies will have similar planning processes to help determine what is successful.

Method

To better understand how agriculture and food companies are using content, I decided to conduct expert interviews with people who work for agriculture and food companies and develop content or lead communication strategy. Their personal experiences in content planning, strategy and evaluation for their organization lead to great insights into how different agriculture and food companies approach content. Following the interview each participant was sent a survey that asked more structured questions that didn't need further explanation for example, do you create content in-house?

Prior to the interviews an interview guide was created to help guide, but not limit, conversations around content planning, evaluation and strategy used in each of the respective organizations. The questions were designed to be fairly open and general, so

there was no guiding on behalf of myself, as the researcher, to produce desired results. Additional questions were asked when necessary for further clarification or to gather more details about that particular topic. Refer to page 34 of the appendix for a list of the interview questions that was asked of each professional.

The additional survey aimed to gather more demographic information and types of media used to develop content. The questions were very pointed and were questions that freed up time during the interview to take a deeper look at content strategy. The survey was distributed to each of the interview participants through Qualtrics. Refer to page 35 of the appendix for a list of the survey questions that were asked.

To recruit individuals to participate, I used two different methods. I began by using my resources within my network to discover individuals who would meet the criteria to participate. I also gathered a list of top agriculture and food companies through Hoover's along with their communications contacts. I reached out to 20 different agriculture and food companies and was able to secure 11 interviews, three were from the Hoover's list and eight came from sources within my network. The initial contact for the interviews was done through email and a phone call was scheduled for a time that was convenient for the participant.

Findings

There was a general agreement amongst the experts that they were still working to determine the best content strategy for their organization. The experts that participated came from a variety of organizations and companies, from non-profit to Fortune 100 companies. The size of their communication teams also varied anywhere

from one half-time employee to 24 members. The average amount of experience for the group surveyed was over 15 years. Despite the variety in the types of organizations and companies that these experts came from, there were some consistent challenge themes that emerged around the areas of strategy, planning and evaluation when it came to content.

Content Strategy

There were three common challenges that stood out when it came to content strategy among the experts: relevancy, principles of journalism and multiple-use content.

Relevancy

The idea of relevancy came up multiple times in my interviews. Each of the companies had a specific set of audiences that they were trying to target. Their content strategy focused on determining what was relevant to each audience. Just like the two-way symmetrical communication model, each expert was trying to create a “win-win” solution with their content (Dozier, L. Grunig & J. Grunig, 1995). The content aimed to provide the information that the target audience wanted in a way that the target audience wanted to receive it. Unlike one-way communication models that emphasize the flow of information outward, these experts are looking for audience insights to determine what will be relevant to each of their audiences, thus creating trust.

Each of the experts that I interviewed discussed the needs to reach different audiences with different interests. One of the experts had defined five different audiences that they were targeting with their content. They struggled to develop content that met the needs of all of their audiences. The organizations with smaller

communications teams discussed the barriers of time and talent to develop multiple pieces of content to target different audiences. The consensus among the group was to develop one piece of content in a way that would hopefully be relevant to all of their audiences.

One of the experts that I interviewed was going through the process of creating a content strategy for their company. They have been taking the time to develop the proper organizational structure that will most effectively support content strategy. When it came to addressing the needs of the different audiences they were targeting they said:

“As we think each of those audiences, we evaluate it through their eyes to say what would they need at this point in time, what do they need to understand? Or what decisions are they making? Versus us saying here’s what we want to tell you.” – CHS Corporate Communications Director

Determining what is relevant is important to content strategy because the more relevant the information the more likely the audience will engage with the content.

“People are more engaged when they feel like they can relate to the content at hand.” – Minnesota Soybean Growers Communications Director

To determine what is relevant, audience insights need to be gathered.

“I love visiting with people, I love hearing their questions, because I think it is a good gauge of what is on their mind. And once you hear what they’re thinking then you can, I don’t want to say cater, but in many ways, identify what is important to them. And so when you know what is important to them then we can

deliver not what they want to hear, but what the coop's doing that aligns with their values.” – Director of Public Affairs, Associated Milk Producers Incorporated

The challenge with relevancy is truly finding out what your audience is interested in or what they want to know. From the 11 interviews that I conducted, only two of them directly asked their audiences what they wanted to know, whether that was through a small focus group or a survey. Many of the other organizations relied on their own knowledge of the audience and worked to put themselves into their audiences' shoes. With all the information out there and many different ways to share information, it was a common challenge among the agriculture and food companies to determine how, where and when to share content to remain relevant.

Another theme that emerged from the group, was the need to be everywhere. When asked what mediums they use to share content, many replied with social media, website, print newsletter, e-newsletter, etc. It was common in the interviews to hear “of course we do all the social platforms” or “we try to have a presence everywhere.” Only one of the companies interviewed said that they strategically decided not to focus on social media because their audience wasn't as active on social and they didn't have the engaging content to post. They had decided to focus on other areas that would better reach their members. This further exemplified the need for understanding each audience group and where will be the most effective place to target them, instead of trying to create content for every platform.

Journalism Principles

Creating content provides value to the organization but it also comes with a big responsibility. Eight of the experts interviewed expressed the challenges with remaining

open, honest and transparent. There is a lot of information at the touch of consumers' fingers, so organizations and companies need to be able to create interesting, authentic content. The idea of story-telling and creating a narrative with content was brought up multiple times.

"I think what our farmers are doing is important and telling that story is very important. I look to provide that information but in balanced way. Because I think consumers, especially the Millennial generation, can tell when they are reading something, taking in a video or looking at a picture, if they are trying to be persuaded or not." – Minnesota Pork Producers Association Director of Communications and Marketing.

Bringing journalism into content marketing creates some ethical challenges that agriculture and food companies are struggling to grasp with limited budgets and few resources.

Cargill focuses much of their efforts on providing great customer service. Their content aims to reflect that same value by providing accurate information that their audiences can trust.

"I mean we have full ownership, we decide how it is said, but I think it is a big responsibility because we have to be ethical about it, and we take that responsibility seriously. We aren't going to shove products down people's throats; we want people to choose us because they trust us, and have shared values with our company," she continues, "We had a couple answers wrong on a quiz we did a couple months ago, and they noticed; the chicken community, they noticed when you get something wrong so I think it is more the pressure to have really

*solid content that you can back up really well.” – U.S. Cargill Feed and Nutrition
Marketing Communications Lead- Poultry*

Agriculture and food companies are recognizing the importance of bringing in journalistic principles to help them accurately share their stories with their audiences. This does not come without its challenges:

*“I think most consumers understand that pigs are castrated. But I don’t know that they want to see it, so we are not going to show it. But we need to be willing to talk about it and answer those questions that they have.” – National Pork Board
Director of Public Relations*

Each of the groups expressed the need to share their story or create human interest pieces. These experts recognized the importance of not just sharing facts but developing stories that people can relate to and hopefully learn something from. Storytelling didn’t just relate to the newsletters that these organizations were working on, they discussed the idea of storytelling on social and through videos. The challenge became how to share a story using visuals and in a short amount of time. All of the experts recognized that the attention span of their audience is shorter and therefore they need to develop a story quickly to engage their audience.

It was also interesting that all of the groups expressed that they were moving away from more traditional ways to share information like press releases to focus more on developing their own content where they had control over what was being said. This is where the journalistic principles come in to play. These companies are developing more of their own content rather than relying on traditional news media outlets to share their story. Although most of them still use those traditional sources, like television, radio

and newspaper, they were relying more on their own content through their own channels to share their brand story.

Multiple-Use Content

Although agriculture and food companies are looking to target their content to specific audiences, they are also trying to leverage the content they are creating across multiple media sources.

“There are obviously opportunities for us to take if somebody's working a project over in one business; we can leverage that content usually somewhere else too.”

- CHS Corporate Communications Director

All of the experts that I interviewed expressed the challenges of limited resources and time, no matter how large the company communications team was. Valuable content needs to be able to be leveraged across multiple platforms to effectively use communication resources. The challenge lies in creating customizable content for different audiences that can be used across multiple platforms. Each organization is creating content for multiple different platforms; *Figure 1* shows the type of content that is being created by agriculture and food companies. It is easy to see from the graph that companies are creating multiple types of content to use resources effectively, they need content that can be easily integrated across platforms.

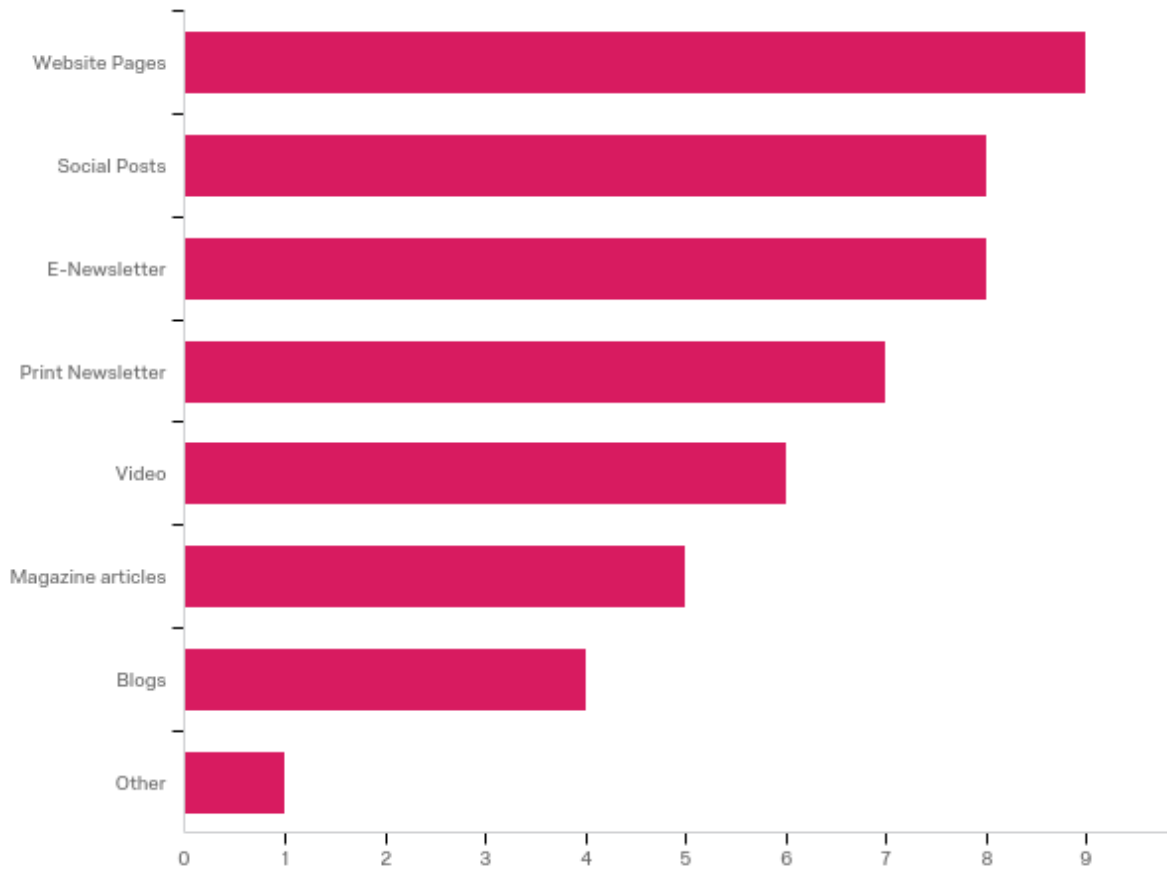


Figure 1. What type of content are you developing (select all that apply)? N=11

Some of the barriers that will be discussed relating to evaluation are also the reason that these companies are looking to leverage the content they are creating. Those barriers include time, talent and resources. Some of the experts are the only people in their organization working to create content, so when they create something they are looking for ways to repurpose it across platforms. There was a common struggle between trying to personalize each content piece for their targeted audience but also how to use it across multiple different media outlets. These professionals were looking for a way to make engaging content that can be used in multiple different areas to save time and money along with reaching different audiences.

Planning

The only consistency across the agriculture and food companies that were interviewed in reference to planning processes, was the lack of consistency. Each person I interviewed had a different process when it came to the planning of their content. Some met weekly with their teams, others planned on a yearly basis. All but one organization interviewed had some type of editorial calendar created. Companies that sold products, tended to align their content calendars with their sales calendar to create a consistent voice that coincided with their business goals.

The amount of people involved in the planning process also varied across organizations. When looking at planning, I was trying to see if there was a consistent way to go about planning content that helped organizations be successful with their content, however there was not. I was also looking to see if there was a method to how companies planned. Many of the organizations brought up the issue of time and the need to want to do more planning to help them create more valuable content but either didn't find the time or didn't know what was the best way to go developing their strategy or plan.

Measurement and Evaluation

Everyone interviewed struggled with how to effectively measure and evaluate the content they were creating for their organizations. Half of the group also expressed that their evaluation of their content didn't play into their strategy or planning for future content. One of the most common challenges was distinguishing outputs versus outcomes.

Outputs vs. Outcomes

The majority of the companies interviewed measured the outcomes of their content efforts like impressions, reach and click-through rates. However, few companies took the next step to measure the outcomes of the content or the changed behavior or attitudes.

“You know right now we’re doing it purely on the number of followers that we have. By the end of the summer we want to double our social media following and I think we might be on triple, so right now it’s just simply based on that. We don’t really have any means in place to be more scientific.” –CEO and Co-founder of Whole Me.

When asked how Minnesota Turkey approaches content evaluation:

“Yeah that is a great question and one that I kind of struggle with for a few reasons. I certainly try to analyze the analytics behind the scenes from our social media accounts, so I look at those numbers and try to interpret what they mean. I look at google analytics from our websites and I do share those numbers with our communications committee. But I will tell you we struggle really hard to find the time, I think really, to pull all that information together on a more regular basis.”
– Communications & Assistant Executive Director Minnesota Turkey Growers.

Only one of the companies interviewed took the next step to go beyond outputs. They developed two surveys that they send out annually to both of their target audiences to gauge the level of attitude change that has occurred. The same questions are asked from year-to-year to provide benchmarks and an accurate measurement of the changes.

There were common barriers that continued to arise as to why companies were not measuring outcomes, time, money, resources and lack of a common method. There are plenty of different types of evaluation equations, but none have been widely adopted across the industry. Agriculture and food companies are struggling to determine what is the best way to measure outcomes.

Another common challenge to measurement and evaluation was how to express to their stakeholders what exactly their content did for them. Some relied solely on numbers to try and express their return on investment and others tried to elaborate more. However, the difficulty to express the value of public relations efforts or their content was common across all of the organizations.

Strategic Recommendations

This study identified five areas that agriculture and food companies found challenging when dealing with content strategy, planning and evaluation. Using content appropriately can increase brand trust and provide consumers with the information they are seeking from agriculture and food companies. With the increase in consumer interest in where their food comes from and how it is produced, it is important that our agriculture and food companies find ways to share their stories. The challenge is finding a way to break through the clutter. Many organizations are using content, but how do you make sure yours stands out from the rest?

“Content can be a lot of fun to produce, so finding enthusiasm for it is not difficult.

The challenge of producing content that engages your audience and ensuring its impact is measurable and effective, is, however, a lot harder (Content Marketing, p.65).”

There is currently a lot of hype and buzz around content but those that I interviewed did not feel fully comfortable with the way that they were addressing their organization's content needs. There are barriers that prevent organizations from fully using their content to the maximum. Those barriers include time, money and resources. This was evident no matter if you had a communications team of one or 24.

The following recommendations will provide ways to address each of the challenges associated with content strategy, planning and evaluation. The recommendations are designed to maximize resources while being conscious of limited time and money.

Content Strategy

With all of the content that is being created on a daily basis, it is important for organizations to have a clear strategy that addresses the needs of their audiences. Content strategy can help ensure that you are creating valuable content that has the desired outcome.

Relevancy

In order to remain relevant to your audience, you need to understand what type of information your audience is looking for and the way they are looking for it. A study conducted by Matthew Kreuter and Ricardo Wray on tailored and target health communication concluded that greater the level of customization, the greater the perceived relevance of the intended recipient (2003). The easiest way to understand what your audience needs is to ask them.

Storytelling is a way to engage your audience however, good storytelling relies on knowing your audience so that you may remain relevant. Hansen and Paul discuss

the importance of understanding your audience to be able to be good storytellers. You must know how the audience is going to be receiving your message, where they are going to receiving your message and how much knowledge your audience already has on this topic (2005). All of this boil down to understanding your audience and in order to do that effectively you need to listen to what your target audience is saying.

There are multiple different ways you can connect with your audience whether it is through a small focus group or through a simple survey. Either would provide valuable insights into what your target audience is looking for. It is great to put yourself into their shoes, but to really understand their perspective you have to ask them. It would be important to do this across multiple audiences that you are trying to target so you have insights into what each audience is looking for. Focus groups will be discussed later in this section, but would be a good way of gathering insights from your audience.

Most of the companies interviewed discussed the use of social media. Social media creates a great space to analyze dialogue from your target audiences. If a survey or a focus group doesn't seem like the right fit, analyzing social media would be another simple tool. You could ask your audience specifically if they have any feedback or types of content they would like to see more of. You could also analyze the types of content that have performed well and look at the sentiment of the comments to determine what seems to resonate well with your audience. The challenge is that this would only target one audience type. If your target audience didn't use social media as much, the insights might not be as valuable.

Principles of Journalism

Consumers today are looking for transparency from agriculture and food companies. The content that is created needs to be open, honest and transparent to continue to build trust with audiences. The agriculture and food companies interviewed expressed the challenges with trying to remain as transparent as possible and the need to embody some of the principles of journalism. The notion of storytelling also calls on companies to become more journalistic with their content. Good storytelling needs to demonstrate ethical standards for accuracy, truth, verifiability and reliable information (Hansen & Paul, 2005).

According to the Society of Professional Journalists, there are four principles that serve as the foundation of ethical journalism:

Seek Truth and Report It

Journalists need to make sure they are being accurate, citing sources and need to take accountability for their work. They should never deliberately distort facts or context.

Minimize Harm

Seek to minimize the harm that potential topics could do. Journalists need to show compassion for those who may be affected by their stories. It is important to consider the long-term implications of the content that is being created.

Act Independently

Journalists should not be persuaded to cover stories differently from bribes or gifts. The primary obligation of a journalist is to serve the public. It is important to distinguish news from advertising.

Be Accountable and Transparent

Journalists have to be able to explain the decisions they make to the public. They also have to be willing to be accountable for their mistakes and correct errors when made (2014).

These principles of journalism can serve as a great foundation for creating content that can be trusted. One of the experts explained her frustration with an article that was framed in a way that couldn't be backed by science. It is important to make sure that the content that is being created is truthful and transparent. If content is flawed or inaccurate you risk losing brand reputation and trust with your audience base.

The purpose of content is not to promote a product, it is to provide value to your target audience. Using these principles, you can help develop good content that is able to be trusted. Every piece of content that is created should be seen from a journalistic view-point, this will help ensure accurate, transparent content.

Multi-Use Content

Creating content that is targeted for each audience but can also be used multiple times is challenging, but not impossible. Good brands rely on consistent tone and message across platforms and across audiences, they speak with one voice no matter the platform or type of content. For agriculture and food companies to be successful at targeting individual audiences but creating content that is usable across platforms, a consistent brand voice is essential.

Determining your brand archetype or personality would be the first step. From there you can develop out the tone, messages and themes you want your content to

convey. If you have consistent tones and messages across content type it will be easier to quickly adapt to each audience and use across platforms.

Content Planning

There are a lot of different communication content planning tools and methods that exist. Most textbooks dealing with public relations encourage a four-phase process (Smith, 2002). One of those methods that can easily be adopted to fit content planning is the R.O.P.E. method which stands for research, objectives, programing and evaluation.

Research

Research focuses on gathering insights on the different target audiences along with the opportunities that content can fill. During the planning process, it is important to gather insights to create a strong content strategy so that you can remain relevant like was mentioned above.

Objectives

Objectives are essential to the planning process. It is important to determine the desired outcome of the content being created. It is difficult to measure success if you don't determine what your objectives are for the content being created. To help measure and evaluate content, your content objectives should try to align with the business objectives. It will be easier to communicate value if your content measures up to the overall business goals of the company.

Programing

Programing includes the tactics that will help carry out objectives. Now that insights are developed and objectives are set, it is time to plan what will actually

be happening. This means figuring out what type of content will be when and where it will be placed. It is important that this step is third in the process because you should not start planning what your content will be and where it will be until you have conducted the proper research and set your objectives.

Evaluation

Evaluation will be discussed more in depth in the next section, but it is important that all content efforts have some form of evaluation. This evaluation should help create insights that you can use to when you start the process over again. It is important to keep objectives in mind when evaluating content. Did the content do what it was meant to do? Did it accomplish the objectives? How will I measure that (Hayes, Hendrix & Kumar, 2013).

This simple, easy to remember model is a good place to start when beginning to plan content strategy. It ties all of the pieces discussed in this paper together nicely, the need to research audiences, set objectives, and measure and evaluate content. However, Smith cautions that these steps must be taken in order. Often times many will skip to the solutions without conducting the proper research to gather accurate insights (2002). It is important to properly implement all of the stages to be able to effectively use your content and make it relevant for your audiences.

Content Evaluation

Many groups are currently measuring the outputs of their content but not the outcomes. Outcomes are important to determining if your content met the objectives set

forth in the planning session. Outcomes also provide a deeper analysis and describe potential behavior or attitude changes.

Focus groups can provide a great way to gather qualitative information from your audience to help evaluate the content. Focus groups are quick and cost effective and provide a great way to gather information about how and why. They should not be used to gather quantitative information that can be generalized to a larger audience.

It is essential that your audience be well defined and contain between four to six people. It is easy to think that more would be needed but having more than six or seven people can dilute the responses of the individuals and not allow for the proper in-depth exploration of thoughts and feelings of the target audience. The participants of each group need to be like-minded. I recommend conducting a focus group for each of the defined audiences. Using the insights for each of the focus groups will allow you to talk about the potential attitude or behavior changes that resulted because of the content that was created. You could also use this opportunity to gather insights for each specific audience and determine what needs they might have to help plan more relevant content. These focus groups should be conducted after your content has been shared but prior to the planning processes so you can use those insights to create a strong content schedule. It would also be valuable to conduct these focus groups on a yearly basis to continue to remain relative to your audiences over the years and track the type of change you are seeing over time.

Surveys would be another way to measure and evaluate more than just outputs of the campaign. It would be important to make sure the questions provided opportunity to give feedback and do not lead the participant. The benefit to using a focus group over

a survey would be that you need fewer people and you can take a deeper look at how and why attitudes or behaviors changed or didn't.

In summary, my recommendations are:

- *Conduct focus groups*: to both determine what your audience finds relevant and to measure and evaluate the outcomes of your content.
- *Use the principles of journalism*: the principles of journalism will help keep your content transparent and help build credibility with consumers.
- *Develop a brand voice*: clearly define your brands voice and messages so content can be easily tailored for different platforms.
- *Use the R.O.P.E planning model*: no matter how often you have planning models, this process can easily be implemented to create valuable content that is measurable and connects to the overall objectives of the business.

These recommendations are meant to be broad so they can be implemented across different types of agriculture and food companies while addressing the issues of content strategy, planning and evaluation. There are certainly other ways and this is just a beginning to developing great content, but these recommendations are easy and will provide a good foundation to using content to better connect with consumers.

Future Research

After reviewing the gaps in the literature and conducting expert interviews, there is potential for future research on how agriculture and food companies are using content. As stated before, one of the fastest growing search terms among business marketing is content marketing. There has not been a significant amount of research related to content. Although many of the public relations principles can be applied to different content opportunities, there is opportunity for more research to be done on content specifically. It would be interesting to know if some of the public relations principles wouldn't work when developing content strategy for an organization.

There is also opportunity to continue to see how consumers are using content from agriculture and food companies. The study by Meyers, Gracey, Irlbeck and Akers identified the need for further research on the uses and gratifications of agricultural blog readers. It would be interesting to see why consumers are looking to agriculture and food companies for their information. This could further help shape content strategies for agricultural businesses.

I have personally seen a big shift in how agriculture and food companies connect with consumers. Science no longer has the same appeal, companies are using emotional appeal to reach their audiences. Content provides that opportunity to connect with consumers and share a story that will develop trust and brand loyalty. A study of more agriculture and food companies would be interesting to see if the same insights found here exist with other companies. A survey could also be conducted that explored the differences in content strategy between companies focused on agriculture and companies focused on food manufacturing.

Closing Thoughts

Agriculture and food companies have the opportunity to use content to address the consumer demands for transparency on how food is produced. Content can also be used to develop trust and brand loyalty among target audiences. It is important for agriculture and food companies to take the opportunity to connect with their consumers and create a dialogue.

Content doesn't come without its challenges. It is important to have a solid content planning, strategy and evaluation for content to be successful. This is just the beginning of the age of content and more is likely to change. Continued research on how companies can use content will be valuable as more organizations begin to develop content strategies.

References

- 2015 Consumer Trust Research. (2015). *The Center for Food Integrity*.
- Ansgar Zerfass Christine Viertmann, (2017), "Creating business value through corporate communication A theory-based framework and its practical application," *Journal of Communication Management*, Vol. 21 Iss 1 pp. 68-81
- Bentele, G., & Nothhaft, H. (2008). The Intereffication Model: Theoretical Discussions and Empirical Research. *Public Relations Research*, 33-47. doi:10.1007/978-3-531-90918-9_3
- Bloomstein, M. (2013). Content strategy at work real world stories to strengthen every interactive project. New York: Morgan Kaufmann.
- Briones, R. L., Kuch, B., Liu, B. F., & Jin, Y. (2011). Keeping up with the digital age: How the American Red Cross uses social media to build relationships. *Public Relations Review*, 37(1), 37-43. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0363811110001335>
- Buhmann, A., & Likely, F. (n.d.). *Evaluation and Measurement in Strategic Communication*. BI Norwegian Business School.
- Chauhan, K. & Pillai, A. (2013) "Role of content strategy in social media brand communities: a case of higher education institutes in India", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 22 Issue: 1, pp. 40-51
- Cole, J. T., & Greer, J. D. (2013). Audience Response to Brand Journalism: The Effect of Frame, Source, and Involvement. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 90(4), 673-690. doi:10.1177/1077699013503160
- Content Marketing Institue (2013) Retrived from <http://contentmarketinginstitue.com/>

- Content Marketing. (2014, March 1). *Marketing*, 65. Retrieved from <http://login.ezproxy.lib.umn.edu>
- Dozier, D. M., Grunig, L. A., & Grunig, J. E. (1995). *Manager's guide to excellence in public relations and communication management*. New York: Routledge.
- DVorkin, L. (2012, October). Inside Forbes: The birth of brand journalism and why It's good for the news business [Editorial]. *Forbes*.
- Hallahan, K. (2014, March). Publicity Under Siege: A Critique of Content Marketing, Brand Journalism, Native Advertising and Promoted User Endorsements As Challenges to Professional Practice and Transparency. *17th International Public Relations Research Conference*.
- Hansen, K. A., & Paul, N. (2005). *Behind the message: Information strategies for communicators*. Boston, MA: Pearson Ed.
- Hayes, D. C., Hendrix, J. A., & Kumar, P. D. (2013). *Public relations cases*. Australia: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Kassel, K. (2016, October 12). Farming and Farm Income. Retrieved from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/farming-and-farm-income/>
- Kreuter, M. W., & Wray, R. J. (2003). Tailored and Targeted Health Communication: Strategies for Enhancing Information Relevance. *American Journal of Health Behavior*, 27(1), 227-232. doi:10.5993/ajhb.27.1.s3.6
- Kurtzo, Fawn; Hansen, Maggie Jo; Rucker, K. Jill; and Edgar, Leslie D. (2016) "Agricultural Communications: Perspectives from the Experts," *Journal of Applied Communications*: Vol. 100: Iss. 1. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4148/1051-0834.1019>

- Light, L. (2014). Brand journalism: How to engage successfully with consumers in an age of inclusive individuality. *Journal of Brand Strategy*, 3(2), summer, 121-128.
- Likely, F., & Watson, T. (2013). Measuring the Edifice Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation Practices Over the Course of 40 Years. In *Public relations and communication management: Current trends and emerging topics* (pp. 143-162). New York: Routledge.
- Likely, F., Rockland, D., & Weiner, M. (2006). Perspectives on the ROI of Media Relations Publicity Efforts. *Institute for Public Relations*.
- Macnamara, J. (2014). Emerging international standards for measurement and evaluation of public relations: A critical analysis. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 3(1), 7-29. doi:10.1177/2046147x14521199
- Macnamara, J. (2014). Journalism PR relations revisited: The good news, the bad news, and insights into tomorrow's news. *Public Relations Review*, 40(5), 739-750. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.07.002
- Meyers, Courtney; Gracey, Kate; Irlbeck, Erica; and Akers, Cindy (2015) "Exploring the Uses and Gratifications of Agricultural Blog Readers," *Journal of Applied Communications*: Vol. 99: Iss. 4. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4148/1051-0834.1064>
- Pulizzi, J. (2012). The Rise of Storytelling as the New Marketing. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 28(2), 116-123. doi:10.1007/s12109-012-9264-5
- Rosenbaum, S. C. (2011). *Curation nation: How to win in a world where consumers are creators*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Rowley, J. (2008). Understanding digital content marketing. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 24(5-6), 517-540. doi:10.1362/026725708x325977

- Schriner, M., Swenson, R., & Gilkerson, N. (2017). Outputs or Outcomes? Assessing Public Relations Evaluation Practices in Award-Winning PR Campaigns. *PR Journal*, 11(1).
- Scott, D.M. (2013). *The new ruels of marketing and PR* (4th ed.) Hoboken, NJ: McGraw-Hill.
- Smith, R. D. (2002). *Strategic planning for public relations*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- SPJ Code of Ethics. (2014, September 6). Retrieved from <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>
- Sundar, S., Limperos, A. (2013). Uses and Grats 2.0: New Gratification for New Media. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* Vol 57(Issue 4), 504525.
- Verčič, D., & Verčič, T. A. (2016). The new publicity: From reflexive to reflective mediatissation. *Public Relations Review*, 42, 493-498.
- Zerfass, A., Verčič, D., & Wiesenbergr, M. (2016). The dawn of a new golden age for media relations? *Public Relations Review*, 42(4), 499-508.
doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2016.03.005
- Watson, T., & Noble, P. (2009). Evaluation in practice - case studies. In *Evaluating public relations: A best practice guide to public relations planning, research and evaluation*. London: Kogan Page.
- Watson, T., & Noble, P. (2009). Evaluation structures and processes. In *Evaluating public relations: A best practice guide to public relations planning, research and evaluation*. London: Kogan Page.

White, H. D. (2010). Relevance theory and citations. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(14), 3345-3361. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2011.07.005>

Appendix A

Interview Guide

- a) What is the purpose of your content?
- b) How does your company develop its content strategy?
- c) What is the value in managing your own channels versus relying on traditional media to communicate for your organization?
- d) How does content development fit into organizational goal setting and other communication objectives and strategies?
- e) Consumers want more information, are you feeling more pressure to tell your story?
- f) How are you telling your story?
- g) How are you measuring and evaluating the success of your content?
- h) How does the content you share contribute to brand recognition, trust, credibility, loyalty and authenticity, in your opinion?
- i) Are you concerned about transparency when developing content? How does your organization address any concerns?
- j) Do you feel like your content influences your efforts to build relationships with stakeholders? Why or why not?
- k) What type of content has performed most successfully for you?

Survey Questions

Q1 Title

Q2 Organization

Q3 Phone

Q4 Email

Q5 Gender

Male (1)

Female (2)

Prefer not to say (3)

Q6 How many years of experience do you have?

Q7 How long have you been in your current position?

Q8 Is your organization

Business to business (1)

Business to consumer (2)

Other (3) _____

Q9 What is the size of your communication team?

Q10 How often do you conduct your content development planning process?

Yearly (1)

Quarterly (2)

Monthly (3)

Weekly (4)

Other (5) _____

Q11 What communication channels do you use to carry out strategy?

Facebook (1)

Instagram (2)

Twitter (3)

YouTube (4)

Media Channels (5)

Website (6)

Other digital portals (7)

Newsletters (9)

Magazine (10)

Other (8) _____

Q13 Do you pay for?

	Yes (1)	No (2)
Channels (1)		
Endorsements (2)		
Branded Channels (3)		

Q14 Who creates your content? (Select all that apply)

- In-house (1)
- Freelancers (2)
- Former journalists (3)
- Purchase content from third parties (4)
- Other (5) _____

Q15 What type of content are you developing? (Select all that apply)

- Social Posts (1)
- Blogs (2)
- Magazine articles (3)
- Website Pages (4)
- Video (5)
- E-Newsletter (6)
- Print Newsletter (7)
- Other (8)

Appendix B

Interview #1

T: What type of content is your organization creating and what is the purpose of your content?

I: The purpose of our organization is to promote beef products in general. To educate consumers about beef products and provide research that is helping to better the industry. The content that we develop is really focused around how to help consumers with our products, knowing what to do with our products whether it is how to cook it, how to buy it and what to look for when they are buying it how to prepare it, kind of a lot of how to's, but we also realize that consumers have another barrier to eating beef and that is not necessarily understanding how it's raised or feeling confident in the safety and production methods behind that so the other main channel of content really is showcasing farmers and ranchers on their farms producing the product, answering some of those questions that shoppers are concerned about in how we raise beef products and also following that through the supply chain with our local meat processors and other meat packers and then through the retail shelves.

T: So where and how is this content being distributed?

I: I would say I started this position five years ago and right at that time they were making a shift from providing a lot of the content that we were using through television and radio dissemination to primarily disseminating that information online. The Minnesota Beef Council we follow our national team's lead which is very digitally focused so we have a lot of that content disseminated through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, we just started an Instagram account a couple months ago. We've also been utilizing various digital advertising strategies to take snip-its of that in a much smaller portion of that content and disseminating it through those channels with hope that the message is absorbed and also, they find out more information and watched the full content pieces on our other channels and then through our website as well.

T: How does your company develop its content strategy?

I: It's quite complex. We actually have a five-year strategic plan that is developed on a national level and that is edited on an annual basis but it is totally started from scratch every five years. That strategy helps to guide the work of our volunteer leadership both on a state level and national level to identify priorities when it comes to specific areas whether it's health and nutrition, consumer trust, food safety, and export growth areas and out of that volunteer leadership they're basically identifying the road map for the plan that they would like staff to develop work plans under. Staff go back develop work plans and bring them back to committees for and their producer leaders for their feedback and for their buy-in and a lot of that really talks about what type of content is going to be developed for the year, what type of dissemination plan is going to be in place in addition to what I mentioned earlier about how we are communicating with producers or with consumers we also have an obligation as an organization that we have to communicate back to the investors of the check-off to producers who pay into the check-off so some of that also is part of our content development strategy and how do we showcase that and reach them in a way that they are going to receive information which is usually an older demographic in rural areas.

T: When you are planning how you are going to do that after getting guidance from your board how many people are involved in that strategy and how often do you do that?

I: We're a very small staff. We have four full-time employees and then two contractors on a state level so the Minnesota Beef Council developed a marketing plan about three months before our fiscal year starts. A lot of times the marketing plan is fairly vague saying that you are going to create this content and you are going to disseminate it in the best way to reach the best audience. Sometimes it's figuring out what the calendars going to look like, when are some key times of the year we want to ramp up marketing efforts and is the marketing and the content development maybe focused in on a specific holiday or a specific time of the year an example would be May and June are when we really focus on grilling, so our content is really focused on that, whereas other times of the year we're trying to come up with fast easy

pieces of content that working millennials parents would be able to take and do something with on an everyday occasion, so we have a bit of a content calendar of things that we know are coming out for content and then some of those areas will see that there's some holes or some gaps so we might develop a blog post about it or some different social content if we see that there are some vacancies in our calendar.

T: What is the value of managing your own channels and content versus relying on traditional media to communicate for you organization?

I: I would say that the advantages for us are that we know our business better than anyone else. There is definitely a tendency and there has been a tendency in the past to outsource some of that work because it's very time consuming, but the key to media is that the content is relevant and you're communicating your message appropriately. We are the experts at the content and so there sometimes becomes a bit of a disconnect, so the advantage that we have in doing it ourselves is we are able to adjust much faster if we see some things working well and not working well.

T: What advantages does creating your content have over trying to pitch a story to a news organization?

I: I had mentioned prior to me coming here when the strategy was really radio and television you're at the whim of when radio and television want to cover your content you're also kind of forced to hand that off to and to outsource that because you're not the expert in producing TV commercials and radio commercials but the advantage that keeping it in-house and taking some of these newer strategies allows us to be able to push the information out when we want it to be pushed out were not we still do try to get earned and to get coverage and working that angle as well but we're able to share our story when we want to share it when we think it's appropriate and we can share the content that we want often times you try to pitch a news story or coverage on media and sometimes the story that was pitched and the story that was agreed upon turns out to be much different when the final product comes out so we have full creative control over what the content is and how it's disseminated and when it's shared and to which audience we're sharing it to so there's a lot of advantages there the biggest change is often that becomes funding becomes a challenge because you can do all this great stuff you can come up with all this great content and share it when you want to share to your audiences but if there's not funding that goes behind that to support it you know it's you're forced to create your own interested people we can't jump on the bandwagon of TV stations followers. We have to create our own followers and create our own interests and sometimes that costs some money and some time in developing that followership.

T: So you mentioned audience, so what does this creating your own channels and content mean for your audience members like how does that impact them?

I: Well I guess were, along with that big shift about five years ago the National Beef Checkoff Program rally prioritized older millennial parents as our target audience so they classify them as 25 - 44-year-old parents of children and with that we have to figure out what content do those people want to see. What's interesting to them, so market research provides us with tweaks every six months with that but really we're seeing that they are an audience that like social media and Facebook is a very popular medium for them. They like videos and visuals and they were trying to cater a lot of our content toward what does a working parent need. They probably need quick recipes. They need to make sure that they food that they are feeding their kids is healthy and safe and that goes along with some of those producer or production concerns that those people have from time to time and being able to make sure that we're addressing those concerns in a place where they're already going to be which is online, on the internet on their social media channels and through YouTube. They're more likely to see scout information on a website than they are to make a phone call and research it that way. So, it really for the long time and trying to understand who our audience is and what makes them tick and then it becomes developing content that they seem to want to care about and that's kind of is always the moving target. You know there's some things we think would be a hit with that audience and that just doesn't resonate and then we take a step back reevaluate and come up with new strategy.

T: So how does content development fit into organizational goal setting and other communication objectives.

I: I would say how does it fit into goal setting and other communication objectives. I think it's we when we go through our marketing plan we are setting out goals. We are setting out this is what we are hoping

to do in this category this is what we want to accomplish every quarter what we want to accomplish in every year and with that it becomes how do we get there how do we get a more engagement on our social media channels obviously it's going to be through content so then it becomes how do we develop content for what people are looking for. We do have quite a few opportunities to interact with consumers on a face to face basis in person and throughout the year and we get a sense of what are they asking us about. What are their barriers for choosing beef or not choosing beef and so then we figure out how to develop content to address those. Like you had mentioned in the beginning of this conversation content seems to be this really big buzz word but ultimately it we've had content since the start of this earth. I mean anytime you're talking you have content in your message anytime you're putting a newspaper together there's content your website there's content so it's what are the themes what are the areas we're going to address and how do we ensure that we're helping to move ourselves along this path of improving beef demand improving beef perception improving and building upon consumers' confidence in the products and that all has to be done through content and then it becomes a matter of how do you take the measurement component of that content and put it into some sort of a response to your goal how are you even measuring what you're doing to ensure that you're helping to achieve that goal or that strategy.

T: What is the relationship between an editorial calendar, business goals, communication objectives and strategies?

I: I guess for us they are all kind of intertwined. I would say it is in a pyramid effect you have your strategies at the top you have for us it's our long term strategic plan then we have our marketing plan for the year the marketing plan is broke out into very specific tactical strategies so most of that is through communication strategies and then it goes down to how do we take it a step further into the content strategies under each of those communication objectives and those things probably all live on different documents and different places but we try to look through the same lens of does this keep every content piece that we're developing fit up to that overarching strategic plan is it helping to do x,y and z and if not then that's probably not the right piece of content if it is ok making sure that we're staying in line on those different layers of our mission.

T: So consumers want more information are you feeling more pressure to tell your story?

I: Yes. Absolutely. I think it's a double-edged sword though I think consumers want more information but with that being said there's so much information out there on everything you can imagine and I think at times they feel bombarded with information, so they don't want that information in a ten-minute-long lecture they want it in thirty seconds so I think it becomes very challenging but at the same time it's an opportunity.

T: How are you telling your story?

I: So we are trying to tell our story through little snippets of factoids. We are hearing more and more and one of the time searched things that we're finding in Minnesota consumers specifically is where their beef come from? How do they find local beef? How do they connect with a local farmer? And as much as that maybe it actually was a piece that surprised us it's one of the higher sections of our website for traffic is meeting a local farmer. We really thought people were looking to understand some great recipes and they are that's also a very high spot on our website. But figuring out how we can take a farmer's story which is sixty years of history and condense it into a very concise message that basically shares enough about them where the consumer feels comfortable and confident that they can relate to the farmer and that they're doing a good job, but also give them some tid bit of information. In terms of content, videos, pictures, infographics have been really helpful the other piece in terms of building the Minnesota Beef Council's Brand I think that's been helping is putting a face to our staff. You know we're people just like everyday shoppers and we have questions and we sometimes work make a product at home and it does not work out that well we're trying a new recipe and here are some of the hiccups so we're trying to do a better job of putting that human face to the person who's raising the food the Minnesota Beef Councils kind of sharing that message. The local meat market that is selling the beef for the grocery store meat manager that's selling the meat and all the way to you know an everyday person and how they can have success with our products.

T: How are you measuring and evaluating the success of your content?

I: That is the million-dollar question. I would say I think the hardest part about what we do with our specific business we don't sell widgets. So, we don't have any numbers that say you sold this many more widgets this month and that could be simulated to the great traffic you're getting on social media. So, I think that becomes challenging for how do we communicate that back to investors through social channels it's likes, comments, shares, engagements. Those are all things we're tracking on a monthly basis. On a website it's how many hits, how many unique visitors, how long did they stay, how many pages did they visit, did they find our website that indicates did they find our website navigable. Through physical events that we're at what kind of questions are we getting what kind of conversations are we having are people picking up literature are they do we see a boost in any of our social channels or our website after we do an event. But, at the end of the day, the numbers that we do know are how much beef is sold in the United States and there's so many variables that go into that. We know how much beef and get updates on how much beef is sold internationally and again there are very many variables that go into that so to be able to credit any of those numbers to a specific effort that we did is nearly impossible. I guess one of the strategies that farmers talk about all the time is doing a better job and continuing to improve and I think that's the metric that we're trying to evaluate is our website getting better are we increasing those metrics. Is our social content getting more interest you want to break it down to specific social content? There are some things, there's a specific video that looked like four other videos that we did and the one video just did not perform well on Facebook and we don't necessarily know why that one didn't perform as well as the others, but we stopped and re-evaluated and stopped putting money behind that specific video and then put money behind something else so there's ongoing evaluation on how things are doing, but there's really no benchmark it's just kind of measuring yourself against previous success or against your expectations and trying to adapt and adjust as you move forward with those tactics.

T: So how does the content you share contribute to brand recognition, trust, credibility, loyalty and authenticity in your opinion?

I: I think that that is how most of the public is forming their opinions about brand recognition and credibility and trust is through those pieces of content because you can't just really look at a two dimensional business anymore it has to be three dimensional it has to be more personal and sharing that information that you as a business have that you're the authority on and putting it into a format in which the customer wants to see it and feel it and I sometimes have to take a step back and think ok how do I interact with other brands. How as a consumer myself do I find a good restaurant to go and eat at or want to buy this product or this clothing item from a specific brand and so figuring out what makes me tick as a consumer helps to maybe provide insight as to how our shoppers and how the general public that is viewing beef is viewing us but I think that's really really important people are expecting so much more from a business and a brand. They want to know who these people are and what they care about and what makes them tick and why they can trust them. So now we're forced to make sure that we have content that addresses that. Making sure there's content that shows that you can trust a farmer that here are the great things they're doing and they're just like you and they are parents and they know are on the PTA and they've coached their kid's little league team and we're the Minnesota Beef Council as a brand and we're people too and this is how we relate and connect so I think that's really even changed a lot in the last five years and actually prior to my time here when I was at the Minnesota Farm Bureau there you just wanted to be a brand you didn't want the personal you know the personal content you didn't want to really affiliate you as a person with a brand it was just a brand, but now it seems like that doesn't work anymore with the general public you have to be more personal and you have to connect on that personal level in order to develop trust and in order to develop that relationship that your content is going to go nowhere if there's not a foundation of a relationship as a brand with that person.

T: Why are you concerned about your transparency when developing content?

I: In terms of is the. Yeah I would say we are concerned about transparency I think that's what we hear over and over especially as a specific food company everybody wants to know where the food is coming from and how it's raised and what we do to care for our animals so I think that's definitely something that

we've looked at a lot more strategically in terms of our long range strategic plan transparency is on there as definitely a priority and improving consumer trust in our products so then how do we take that long range strategic vision and incorporate that into our communications strategies, into our content and making sure that we're appearing to be as translucent and open as possible for customers to be able to understand what it is that we do, but I think in the meat business it's also challenging because there's somethings you just can't really be transparent about and consumers will say they want transparency but yet in other research we find out that they don't want to know everything so it's this fine balance of how much do we show, how much is too much and where do we draw that line.

T: Do you feel like your content influences your efforts to build relationships with stakeholders? Why or why not?

1: I think so. Stakeholders is a very broad term. One of the things that we've been finding with content is there are a lot of players in the beef business that we've been leaning on for content. They help you know we can share their content they can share ours. We want them to view us as a third party piece of information and so I think that's I think our content has helped to develop those relationships with stakeholders and you go down the line stakeholders and I can get very specific into just the everyday consumer, but I think in terms of the beef brands in this state with our stakeholders who are our producers one of the strategies our board has tried over the last couple years and I think it's working slowly but surely it's working is instead of communicating directly with a farmer or an investor let's just show them what we're doing and they're not seeing it on TV they're not maybe hearing it on the radio, but how can they see it through social media and as more and more of that generation and that specific demographic become more involved on social media and through other social channels their seeing what we're doing with their investment and I think then we don't have to spend extra money putting it in front of their face in a on a medium we wouldn't traditionally use rather they're able to see it in action and see the comments see the shares see the like and see the engagements I think that definitely is helping to improve relationships with stakeholders, but on the flip side I think we have a fear in this office of not leaving somebody out so if we're partnering with a specific beef company for an event or for a social share or a retailer for something we feel like we're maybe taking a baby step back with the others that are not being included. So that becomes a bit of a juggling act and making sure that you're being fair and balanced and trying to represent everybody.

T: So in your opinion what type of content has performed most successfully for you?

1: I would say our videos have been the most successful for the most part those are all produced nationally most of those I mean like production videos thirty seconds to two-minute-long videos that are cooking videos. Those have done really well we've amplified them through YouTube through Facebook promotions. Those seem to be kind of I almost hate to say because I feel give it a month and maybe those videos are going to be old news now, but they seem to be very trendy right now and people are watching them and they are engaging enough they are staying the whole time and they're soaking up some piece of information. That's the challenge with content our old content use to be more brand recognition and advertising and now we want some sort of education element to go with that content. So, the videos have been helpful in that regard. Which again we're just measuring on the views we're measuring on the engagement. We have no idea how many of those people that saw that video went home bought that cut of steak at the grocery store and made that specific recipe that night, so if you want to talk about real metrics that's where the whole circle follow-through would come from. The other thing that we've been having some fun with were not exactly sure if it's working. Were happy with our engagement on social media with it, but is through Facebook Live Videos because I think that's the opportunity where we can help develop that trust with farmers with our staff with the work that we do with our credible experts such as the University of Minnesota meat science team or somebody so that we're showcasing who the industry is and what they're about in a very raw and personal format.

Interview #2

T: What is the purpose of your content?

2: To Build consumer trust in today's pork production.

T: How does your company develop its content strategy?

2: Well we have We Care ethical principles. Which is pig farmers' commitment to doing what's right on the farm. All the content kind of surrounds that. Now we might not actually come out and say like animal care, but it's kind of based into the content that we create. Our environment sustainability. That's the overarching theme and then we create content that's engaging for people.

T: How often do you work to develop your content?

2: We develop content monthly. That's on a social basis.

T: Who's involved in that planning process?

2: So, myself. Another staff member and then we also use an ad agency to help with that.

T: What do you feel is the value in managing your own channel's in content versus relying on traditional media to communicate for your organization?

2: We can definitely be more limber. Like there something changes and we need to change it we can change it on the fly. It's more that ability to be able to change your content easily.

T: What does that mean for like your audience?

2: I think you know especially for producers and people in the industry that are active on social media which allows us to reach them where they are, their jobs are pretty busy. They are not always in front of the TV for what we consider traditional media. So, we can reach them when they want us to reach them.

T: How does content development fit into organizational goal setting and other communication?

2: So as part of our strategic plan and overarching goals is build consumer trust and so that kind of fits this content creation goes into that strategic plan goal building consumer trust.

T: What is the relationship between your editorial calendar, business goals, communication objectives and strategies?

2: Well I think our editorial calendar is generally driven by business goals and content strategy so, it's that overall strategic plan of and I think you see that when we say farmer instead of pork producer and say barn instead of facilities. You know really working on the words we use. Does that answer your question?

T: Consumers today want more information. Because of that are you feeling more pressure to tell your story?

2: I don't think pressure to tell the story. I would say probably like I don't feel pressure like I know, you know consumers I think in part they want to just know our farmers and where their food comes from. I don't know that they want to know like every minute detail, but they want to have permission to purchase and permission to buy the eighty-nine cent dozen eggs instead of the \$2.39 cage free dozen eggs. So, I think it's, not that we have pressure I just think it's how do we get more farmers or more people in the industry active in sharing their story.

T: So, kind of to piggyback off of that, how is the National Pork Board telling their story?

2: You know the story of today's pork production is really done through our grow pig farming social media channel as well as farm tours and being present at events.

T: What does that comment look like?

2: Oh, like what type of events? Gosh it could be like you know sustainability conference. It could be something else. So, those are, I'm not necessarily involved in those but we are active in kind of reaching those influential decision makers so that when they want to make decisions, we're working so that they have the right information available and they have people they can talk to.

T: How are you measuring and evaluating the success of your content?

2: We've really move to engagement. So, obviously impressions and returns are important and they are ways to measure, but they are not the only ways. So, it's really engagement, views, shares, so moving past kind of the superficial stuff to more, you know, in depth. What did someone do something with the content.

T: How does that play into your planning for like the next month or the editorial calendar that you're developing?

2: I think we always go back and look what performed well. For us blog posting videos performs a lot, but also adding some dollars behind promoting posts because to be seen a lot of time you got to promote it. And if something is performing well, then we will promote it with a couple dollars.

T: Are you concerned with transparency when you are developing content?

2: I call it transparency with an insuring filter. I mean, I don't think people want to see. I think most consumers understand that probably pigs are you know, castrated. But I don't know that they want to see it, so we are not going to show it. But we need to be willing to talk about it and answer those questions that they have.

T: Do you feel like your content influences your efforts to build relationships with stakeholders?

2: I think so. I don't know that our decision maker influences our content strategy. I think we go based off what people are interacting with on a social level.

T: So, what type of content, you kind of touched on this just a little bit, but I missed it, just to be on the safe side. So, what type of content has performed most successfully for you?

2: I would say blog posts and videos that tell a story. You know that's really telling that story. So, if you like at our woman in real pig farming video or even our most recent "The Secret Lives". It tells a story of the people and brings in the pig.

Interview #3

T: So, in regard to content, what type of content are you creating and what is the purpose or what do you hope that your content will do?

3: So, we create content using a couple different mediums with a couple different intentions. For example, we have content that we use to update stakeholders, our industry professionals and people who we work and behalf of to keep them up to date about what the programs are doing and where things are at for the year. There is content used to connect with consumers, the people at the end of our industry, who we depend on to buy our product and that is usually done through social media so a lot of electronic content there. And then we also have kind of a mixed media content for reaching policy people on the other side of our association organization to help influence some policy but also just create awareness of the issues and struggles facing Minnesota pig farmers.

T: What type of content do you use for both the stakeholders you didn't touch on and then the policy?

3: Yep so the stakeholders is a print newsletter and an e-newsletter. Generally similar content just more expanded than the print newsletter that is a bi-monthly newsletter sent out to our stakeholders. Then with our policy people a lot of it is content through the use of newsletter or creating info sheets, things that they can refer to or call on if they have questions about how things would affect farmers. So, a lot of that is kind of in an effort to connect them back to farmers, some print stuff there is also some e-newsletters sent out. We create content as bills are moving to just kind of keep legislators aware of what kind impact they are having.

T: So how does Minnesota Pork go about developing its content strategy?

3: The strategy always looks at what ways do we need to deliver the content in a way that the people will read it and get the information that they need from it. And that is understanding that some of these people can be very busy, both our farmers and stakeholders but also our consumers. It's hard to reach an audience that has a lot of content coming at them every day. We want to make sure ours is in a format that is usable for them, that they understand, and that gets the point across very quickly. So, we have kind of segregated how we deliver that content like I said through social media, the print, or some of our media outreach and other ways. Those are how we feel we can best reach those audiences with the content that they need and that's in a format that's understandable for them. So, it's definitely how they are going to take it in is probably the number one idea behind how we decide where the content goes and how we create and shape it and I think that is how we have been able to be successful.

T: How do you determine what each audience wants or what way they need it?

3: A lot of it is kind of the evidence that has worked in the past. In my role, specifically and previously is kind of trying different things and seeing which ones we get feedback from is probably the main one with our stakeholders. But also reaching out, we do have boards of directors that lead all of our organization and sometimes I will reach out to them and ask them certain stories or pieces of information were on point with what they think that people similar to themselves in industry would be looking for. So, I do some of that personally. With social media, it is pretty obvious with consumers I mean I have a lot of metrics there that help me determine whether or not certain things are more successful. The nice thing there is that I can see if video, pictures or stories are being successful and sometimes maybe it's the content of that story that made that picture or video successful. So, it is a lot easier to tell with consumers. There is a lot more metrics available for those things and legislators it is even more difficult because they kind of have to keep their cards close to their chest sometimes on stuff but it is able to be told if we are successful or not through some of the relationships that we can get from the information we provide them and the content that is out there. So, there is plenty of metrics out there from consumer outreach. Farmers it is a smaller audience I mean we only have 3000 pig farmers in Minnesota so it is easier to kind of gauge to response from that content.

T: So, what do you see as the value in managing your own channels and content versus relying on traditional media to communicate for your organization? When I say traditional media, I mean like in the past where it was very heavy like we're going to send a press release hope a new story picks it up but now obviously we have a lot of different channels. So, what do you see as the value in managing your own channels and content versus relying on traditional media?

3: I think it's all about consistency in the messages and how people receive the information. If it is kind of consistent, it is something they rely on and if it's good content that they are familiar with. You kind of become that trusted source of information, and I think that we try to do that for all of our audiences. Can you repeat the question one more time? I just want to make sure I am doing it right.

T: So, I am just asking about the value of managing your own channels and content versus relying on traditional media to communicate for your organization?

3: I think and that is another interesting thing since we do have such varied audiences. When I am talking to our farmers versus consumers, certain traditional media just don't reach those audiences anymore. It's not the fault of traditional media it's just the way it's gone. So, I am able to kind of target those audiences with the media that they're used to receiving and taking in but I am also probably able to provide more timely information and get ahead of the trends that sometimes those traditional media are slow to pick up on and social media is a perfect example of that. I am able to use all those tools to provide content in a way that is kind of is leading to trend instead of just reacting to it. I think the flexibility of managing my own is a lot, it provides a lot of freedom but I am also able to stay consistent with how we deliver it. Traditional media is sometimes able to leave out parts of the story on certain issues and then in an industry where there are a lot of stakeholders that are running businesses and we have foods that going out to consumers it is really important to keep the whole message all there. So, I think that is something where having that little bit of control is also important for our message.

T: So how does content development fit into organizational goal setting and other communication objectives you may have?

3: I think it kind of leads the way because for a lot of our efforts we want to make sure it is worth the investment of what we are doing and the time. I use a lot of resources in my fellow co-workers to help make sure I am staying on point with the information that we are creating and the content. We also have some outside help from agency that helps us make sure with the consumer and that we are still hitting the mark on things. But I think it kind of leads the way just because we have so many projects going on and we don't have necessarily the manpower to tell everybody's story all the time so I think it is important for when we have that opportunity and it can provide meaningful content for both our consumers and our stakeholders we have to make sure that it is really useful to them. Because of how our office is set up it has to be useful of my time as when so we want to make sure that it is good stuff and that we are doing a lot of good programming outside of that so sharing that information and content is really important.

T: What is the relationship between your editorial calendar, the business goals and your communication strategies?

L: I have been trying to streamline them and put them a year out would be my goal. Sometimes that is hard to execute because of timing, but I do try to base my editorial calendar and also my social media calendar kind of based on where programs are moving and what is coming up. Especially in our print newsletter to our stakeholders that's a lot easier for me to plan because that is a bi-monthly, I know exactly as things are happening, when they're happening and the information is pretty easy for me to get myself. In communication strategy in general that might be where it is a little tougher sometimes just because we do have some different underlying goals when we are talking to consumers. Sometimes its image focused content that we want to share that story of our farmers but also encourage our consumers to buy pork. So sometimes those things don't always line up in our content delivery. I do try to manage those things through social media calendars and keeping them consistent with duration and number of pieces of content that I share but I am still working on how to balance those things in a way that is useful but also moves our agenda forward. So the communications and the other programing that we have kind of makes it a little difficult to line up things. But I think it is really important in that it keeps the information really timely and the content relevant which is obviously the whole point in providing good content is making it relevant. So I try to align those things close together.

T: So consumers want more information, because of that are you feeling more pressure to tell your story?

L: I am, but sometimes I struggle with how do I relate this to a consumer who may have no idea or any experience to draw from about farms. Being a consumer myself, since like I have questions that like most people probably don't know about their pork or how it was raised and the farmers that do it. So it is really hard to, I think kind of gauge their understanding level to begin with because like I said there is a lot of information out there and we would really like it to be balanced I think there are enough people that are against production agriculture but there is plenty of people and great farmers at the other side to. So it's hard to not always play defense I guess, I don't think we have anything where we should be trying to defend. I think what our farmers are doing is important and telling that story is very important and providing that information but in balanced way I think is what I strive for the most because I think consumers and especially the millennial generation can tell when they are reading something or taking in a video or looking at a picture if they are trying to be persuaded or not. I think you have to be really authentic with your content and very honest and open with that information to really move the needle with anybody. So I definitely think they want a lot of information and I hope that we can provide enough information so that they can make whatever decision they are going to come to. Obviously I would like them to be in favor of our pig farmers and purchasing pork. I am also realistic in understanding that if we provide good information, at least we have given them the tools to make the informed decision and I think it is so difficult when they can have information coming at them almost constantly. Some of it is filtered and some of it isn't. So that also adds a challenge to that goal.

T: So you touched on this a little bit, so how are you going about telling your story?

L: So we are doing a lot of multimedia things, trying to reach as many people as we can wherever they are at. So social media is a big one. We also create some information and work with other established groups and organization to kind of get our foot in the door with reach people that aren't familiar with farming or maybe have questions about how to cook pork and things like that. So it's kind of a mix. Social media is probably our best way to do it especially given the cost. Social media is pretty low cost compared with the number of people you can reach with it. But providing multimedia within that like I said pictures, videos, short block post, news stories, things like that are useful and we have seen good success with all three. So kind of varying that content helps with that as well but consumers are sometimes tricky to reach. We have used some tradition media vibes to do some extra outreach in certain places when we feel it timely. Just kind of trying to vary up where we place our information, the foody movements in the twin cities metro area is a pretty prominent thing so we try to jump on that wave with some information and events and outings. That type of content that those people are interested in, recipes, cooking information, answering their questions about pork in general if we are at events, those sorts of things. And then the social media is

more of a catch all, it's got the foody movements, millennials and has also got plenty of young families too.

T: How are you measuring and evaluating the success of your content

L: There are a lot of metrics with social media. I think the one that I look for the most because I think reach is kind of a fuzzy number but I really look for the engagements with social media and the media shares because I think those things are just able to amplify content that we created. One thing that we talk about is creating the leavers. So what we do in a note with a consumer or one of our stakeholders and then they share that again and the content keeps moving more organically. I think it is a lot more powerful. So those are some of the metrics I use on social media especially because the organic implication is a lot more valuable than sometimes coming from an organization like ours. That's our biggest one. This is just some recognition too that I pick up from our other areas. Some traditional media I mean they can provide some metrics too. It's sometimes hard to benchmark those things against campaigns if it is with a group that you have not worked with before so that can be a little difficult. I think in some of the things that I talked about our image versus our pork promotion. It is a lot easier to see if content is moving product versus image work. It is a really fuzzy thing because we can't measure sentiment very easily across the platforms we use and also just our interactions with people and the content that they are taking in. And sentiment is one of the biggest things we have as pig farmers because sure we can see if they are buying more pork or buying less pork after taking a video or using a coupon but you can't tell that with image efforts and a lot of our work is kind of going in that direction just because there are fewer farmers and a lot more consumer and they have questions about their food. So sentiment is very important to us and that's hard to measure with the content and things that we put out. I think that if there is some recognition with your brand and your image and the content you put out and you kind of see a little more pick up I think that is one of the tools that I try to use or if I guess one of the things that I try to look at is I send out information or content and then traditional media comes to me asking for it. Again I think that is a good indicator that they feel that that information is something that their viewers are interested in so I guess that is one of the other metrics that I use personally to measure the success of that stuff.

T: Do you ever do any, measure any attitude change? You talked about how difficult it is to measure sentiment. Have you found a way to do that attitude or behavior changes?

L: I haven't found the silver bullet for that yet. There is some ideas out there, I do use a media monitor tool to watch. They have some sentiment indicators there. Like I said again it's not a science. There is not a good scale to measure sentiment. If I have taken someone who is very against pig farming and made them ok with it versus someone who is ok with it like a total believer out of it. It is hard to measure those things. Especially with consumers in general but even with our producer it's hard to understand if they are feeling positive about the information that we are sharing. They are usually quick to tell you if they are not but it is kind of a catch 22 in that I guess I haven't found the best way to measure that yet.

T: So how does content you share contribute to brand recognition, trust, credibility, loyalty and authenticity in your opinion?

L: I think because of the story of our farmers and kind of that underlying I don't want to say persona but like that identity of our farmers has really kind of shaped and formed our identity and our brand and the content that we try to share. I always say that I try to feel like how I feel like when I am talking to a pig farmer like they are very genuine people they are authentic, they are prominent in their community and involved. So I kind of try to shape our message in a way that makes it very down to earth. I always so not preachy, I want to share the information like I said people can tell when they are trying to be persuaded. Just trying to keep the content very real and just at a level that is very understandable. That feels like something that you can trust and I say that with some of the style that we use in creating our brand and our images and our videos. Just kind of that feeling that we have and just very Minnesotan and I think that other people in Minnesota can understand but people from Minnesota love Minnesota. So when we created and did the rebranding with Minnesota pork it is my understanding that they were trying to have that undercurrent throughout it. And our print advertisement, social media things like that. I think it is really important to stay very consistent with your content. Not necessarily the message but how you present the message, how it looks and feels to the people taking that content I think it is very important.

Especially how we move forward in an industry that is almost constantly being challenged. I think it is very important to stay consistent and like a comfortable area that people can build that trustworthiness and to understand that hey they have put out good content and I like how it is coming and like the style and feel really matches the persona of our pig farmers in a way that consumers can understand that like these people are good and the information that they provide is helpful to me and I'm going to go back to them when I have questions.

T: Are you concerned with transparency when developing content and how do you address those concerns if any?

L: I definitely get concerned with some incidences because pig farming is not always sunshine and rainbows and I think it's pretty clear when you are making stuff that makes it sound like pig farming is always awesome like everything about eating pork is always awesome. I think we have to be really honest with ourselves and do a gut check and weigh when we need to vary our content a bit and kind of show that whole story. That can be difficult. That is a opportunity to make yourself a little vulnerable. Sometimes we say that we make our farmers feel a little uncomfortable when we go to a place where maybe isn't in a hundred percent agreement with where our organization is at but we are providing information and content to these people in a way that is real and authentic and I think that is where we have to be with transparency is to except that it is not going to be perfect all the time and we have to be honest in that way because I think when we show honesty and willingness to be vulnerable the transparency and trust levels for sure from our information and content can really help and improve kind of that sentiment and image of our industry which kind of goes back to some of our goals. But it definitely makes me feel uncomfortable sometimes.

T: Do you feel like your content influences your efforts to build relationships with stakeholders? Why or why not?

L: Sometimes I think it has to because I always say that our farmers are very good farmers and sometimes they aren't good at other things, they are not professional in those areas. So I think we kind of have to bridge that gap and the same thing with consumers, I am sure they are really great things so we have to provide them information so they can be better preparers of pork or whatever we need from that group. So I think it is definitely something that with stakeholders we kind of have to address those challenges but there is a lot fewer of them so that does change kind of how the efforts go.

T: What kind of content is performed most successfully for you in your opinion?

L: When it comes down to content we created or worked with our agencies to help create I think our brand and style is kind of invoked in our videos has been really successful and kind of like I said create that feel consumers like, Our farmers like and it gets picked up and shared and is usable, and I think it is also on trend with a lot of things that are out there as far as content videos specifically. I think our videos are what we are able to in 60 seconds share a lot of information and create a lot of awareness with content in a way that is highly successful. We are able to do some social media promotion of it and give it even more likes that way. So I think our videos have definitely been our strong point with reaching consumers. With our stakeholders I would say the print is still because of that demographic it is still what is successful. So we are going to keep riding that out with the best way to deliver the content and create it our farmers are most interested in. One thing that I have learned very quickly with our farmers is the information they receive from us is not necessarily the leading trends or research or products in the industry. They are looking for more human interest coming from us. So that has kind of shaped what kind of content that I don't put in that print newsletter and e-newsletter. It's still used for information to share with them about events and promotions coming up and also looking for like I said that human interest side of our industry and sharing that information through our print is definitely \kind of changed since I have taken on this project.

Interview #4

T: In terms of content that the organization develops, what is the purpose of the content? What are you hoping the content does for your organization?

J: There would be a couple of purposes. Most of the materials that we might put together for content we would hope would be educational for our farmer audience to improve conservation practices. We also would have some materials that we might put together for the non-farm audience to help raise awareness of the work that farmers and ranchers do in terms of conservation practices.

T: How does your organization develop its content strategy?

J: Good question. I don't know that we have a formal plan. Typically we would just meet as staff and kind of discuss ideas and go from there. So I guess small staff, small group meetings would be a strategy.

T: What is the value in managing your own channels and content versus relying on traditional media to communicate for your organization? So owning your own channels versus utilizing press to try to get some of that information out there.

J: Well I guess the advantages is the traditional media doesn't really print the kinds of things that we develop. It is not considered edging enough, or controversial enough, I guess. So as far as sending out, distributing stuff we do a little bit ourselves, but we actually rely on member organizations to do that and that way we know that our stuff gets communicated out to the farmers across the state from the different organizations.

T: How does content development fit into organizational goal settings and other communication objectives? Where does content fit into your organization goals?

J: I would say that, I'm trying to think of a good way to explain it. One of the many, anytime we talk about, like one of our main programs in discovery farms, and anytime we talk about discovery farms communicating what we learned is always one of our priorities for that program. So within that, developing that content is one of the priorities, but I guess we rely on the staff most closely involved with that to put together whatever resources or whatever information that we want to disseminate. If that explains it.

T: What is the relationship between your editorial calendar, business goals, communication objectives and strategies? So with a smaller company this might be a little bit different.

J: Yeah I would say that for us compared to a lot of places, it is a much more informal structure. There are a few things that happen kind of on an annual basis where the data that we collect is reviewed and analyzed by the department of Ag staff and then we have a meeting late in the fall, early winter where we discuss what we learned that year and then from that meeting then we have kind of more informal process of then how do we take that and put that into, whether it is handout or press releases or whatever it might be that we would then start to disseminate. But for the most part it is fairly informal with a few things that are consistently at a certain time every year

T: So consumers want more information. Is your organization feeling more pressure to tell your story?

J: I think we probably get more pressure from our farmers audiences to get information out than we do from consumer audiences. But when we do have the opportunity to share some of the things that we're learning, it is pretty common that we get requests, people want to know where they can find or access the information; they want to learn more. We do get some requests for that.

T: So in regards to that, how do you share that story? When you do get those requests and need to put that information out, how do you share that?

J: The discovery farms information is all available on the discovery farms website. So that is one thing that we do. We also have been trying to do more speaking to different groups, whether community groups or even high school classrooms to share some of those things we are learning and things that farmers are doing. So that has been a new effort on our side to get more of that information out.

T: So how are you measuring and evaluating the success of your content? So those efforts that you have.

J: I don't think I can say we have a formal process for evaluating that.

T: How does the content you share contribute to brand recognition, trust, credibility, loyalty and authenticity in your opinion?

J: Well I think that the more that we have been able to share some of that information that, ya know some of our, with the discovery farms name is being recognized. It has been acknowledged by state agencies that it is another source of data that is out there and available, in terms of water quality kind of issues. The fact that we can explain that there is a third party review that the Department of Agriculture is the one who actually collects and analyzes all the data, it is not us doing our own data; that adds to the credibility of it. And just that it is a unique research project that really only exists in basically Minnesota and Wisconsin.

T: Are you concerned about transparency when you are developing content and if so how does your organization address those concerns?

J: I don't know that we have ever had a discussion about transparency. The information is there. Our concerns are more along the lines of how do people interpret the information that is there. We have had instances where certain media outlets or organizations will take a specific data point and then make much larger claims based on one data point versus what the totality of the research is saying, if that makes sense?

T: So do you feel like the content you have created influences your efforts to build relationships with stakeholders? Why or why not?

J: I guess yeah it does. I mean part of the reason we exist is to have groups wanting the discovery farms data and some of the other things we do. So the fact that we have information that we can provide back to our member organizations, our stakeholders, it is good and valuable, and a lot of our stakeholders are asking for that and asking for additional information, additional research.

T: What type of content do you feel has performed most successfully for your organization?

J: That's a difficult one to answer, especially since we don't have a formal evaluation process for it. I think just in general some of the averages of what the data is showing, the fact that we have farms all over the state that are good representatives of many different types of Minnesota agriculture. I think it is effective to our farm audiences, they feel comfortable that we are collecting real world, realistic type information. So I think that is probably what has been most effective.

T: Do you find that there is a certain way that you share that information that seems to be most successful?

J: There are basically only two ways that we can, other than folks who want to go on the website and find it themselves really the other two ways, we do some one or two page publications that we submit, those seem to be usually very well received at different trade shows type of events. And then when any of our staff do presentations on it I think those also can also be pretty effective there at sharing what we have learned.

Interview #5

T: What is the purpose of your content?

M: You know it really depends on the medium and the audience for us. As far as what we're looking to do with content, a lot of times, it's informative, sometimes it's call to action. Sometimes it's general organizational updates. It really depends on are we looking to reach our members? Are we looking to reach farmers? Are we looking to reach consumers, influencers, policy makers? And then, as far as the specific audience.

What's the end goal, of theirs as far as, what we're hoping to accomplish with that content. So it really varies. I think, piece to piece, story to story, social media, blog, what have you.

T: How does your organization develop its content strategy?

M: That's a great question. I think, for us, as far as strategy and what not, we have a content calendar. Editorial calendar so to speak, throughout the year that we work on that outline some things that we know are coming up. A lot of our content is driven by the projects and activities and events and things that are going on. That are put into place and then into practice voted upon by our board and council. So research that we are investing in, or big community events like farmfest for example. So, a lot of our content is driven by current events or things that we are funding. Then things pop up throughout the year. Like for example in the policy realm, during legislative session right now things pop up so that maybe we need to do a blog post on to address or something along those lines. So, but yes, it's. Our content is very much driven by current events and things that our farmers, that our growers, that our board supports and are invested in.

T: So what do you feel is the value in managing your own channels and content versus relying on traditional media to communicate through your organization?

M: Well I think when you're relying on your own channels whether its your website or your newsletter or those sorts of things, social media. There's obviously control over the message when you're using your own channels whereas if you're going through traditional media for interviews or things like that you don't necessarily have as much control over what is published or said or how things are taken into context. Those sorts of things so you know I think that's part of it. It's just being able to you know, I don't want to use the word control but it's the best one I can think of right now, but you know really being able to control so to speak because it's your medium. But at the same time we do a lot of outreach to traditional media as well because you I think that people still watch the news. They still read the newspaper. They still like to get information that way and there's some credibility there too as far as sharing your story through traditional media. You know, methods as well. And being able to disseminate information that way and share your content that way. You know that's important too. So I think it's almost a complementary relationship in being able to use your own mediums to share content whether that's your blog or your website or your newsletter or whatever, but then also using traditional media to sort of complement that. And you know it kind of depends and varies situation to situation and what content you're looking to share but I think the two complement each other in many ways.

T: So what does that mean for your audience? That you're trying to reach your audience members?

M: I think for audience members, its repetition. Especially if you're doing outreach on multiple platforms. So, repetition is always great because the, I think with so much content available now whether it's the twenty-four hour news cycle or social media or whatever. I think it sometimes takes a few times for people to read something or see something maybe to absorb it a little bit better. So, repetition is always great. It's good sellback for us as an organization. Meaning that, we're showing and sharing information with our members and being at the forefront of issues or topics, or you know, showcasing some of the things that they're investing in whether that's conservation practices or you know research or consumer outreach. Those types of things. So, I think part of it is just being able to reach a broader audience. To be able to repeat your message and have that opportunity, and then also just being able to say hey these are the really great things that farmers are doing or hey this is an important issue or topic you should really pay attention to this. So I think those kinds of things are what's important.

T: So how does content development fit into your organization goal setting and other communication objectives that you have?

Meghan: I would say it's pretty central. Our communication objectives overall. We are always looking to talk about the things that farmers are doing. Look to showcase some of the things that are important to farmers. Work with consumer for example to share information about what farmers do and why they do it. So, I think it's central to achieving our organizational goals which overall, we're really hoping and looking to tell folks that Minnesota farmers are good people. They're just like you and me. They have families. They have kids. They care about the land that they live on. They care about some of the same issues you care about. You know, having safe food for example. Transportation, good roads to drive on. Those sorts of things. So, I think it's trying to share some of that type of information and really bridge the gap. Make those kind of connections as an organization.

T: So, what does the relationship between editorial calendar, business goals, communication objectives and strategies?

M: Well I think that at least for us as an organization communications plays a role in every single thing that we do. From a communications perspective for me personally you have an inch deep knowledge base that millions of miles wide. You kind of have to know a lot about a little bit about a lot you know essentially. But communications it hits on everything. Research, policy, consumer outreach, ethanol for example, membership, member engagement, those sorts of things. So, I think that it's hard to a part of the organization that communications or communication strategy doesn't play a role in. It'd be really difficult to find that I think here.

T: So consumers want more information. Are you feeling more pressure to tell your story?

Meghan: Yea I think so I've been here a little over 4 years, and I think that that's been pretty constant since I started just especially around food issues for example or conservation related issues. There's a lot of information out there, and I think consumers are hungry for information. They want information, and it's just a matter of you know from a consumer perspective and from a farmer perspective where do you get that information because there is so much available to you. So, yea I think there's, I think there's definitely, there's a hunger for information, and it's out there. You know you do a google search and it's at the tip of your fingers. So, I think the challenge is always how do you, how do you stand out? How do you get in front of folks? How do you, how do you kind of bridge that gap a little bit? You know with all of the information that's already out there. So yea, there's definitely, there's definitely a need and it's definitely, it's something we are very aware of.

T: So then kind of taking that question a step further, how are you telling your story? So, how are you getting in front of people and making your information known?

M: Yea. We do that in a variety of ways. Again, it kind of depends on the audience, but, as far as consumer perspective. We have a lot of partnerships with various organizations and things across the state. For example we work with the Minnesota Twins and the St. Paul Saints. We work with the University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. So some of those types of partnerships you know provide great opportunities for us to share farmers' stories in a fun and friendly way. You know there's a lot of families in those venues, and it's just, it's a fun, it's a fun way to connect with people. We also have programs like common ground for example. Or we're involved with the USSRA. Where those are organizations that have farmer volunteers that you know work towards connecting with consumers. Whether it's at a farm dinner or food dialogue type of event. So, those are some things that we do. We also do a lot of social media outreach. We do a lot of traditional media outreach. We do a lot of blog posts and web types of things, but I think it's kind of a combination of communications media mediums in order to try and tip those goals and try to reach people.

T: How are you measuring and evaluating the success of your content?

Meghan: This is something I think, measuring success of content has always been a challenge for us, you know a facebook for example if you do a boost it post or an organic post. That gives you some metrics. Anytime you do a paid media sponsorship obviously you get some recap information there, but I think one of the markers or ways that we, that we measure our content or the success of our content, is that we do annual surveys. We've been doing this for about 5 years now. And we survey farmers across the state and we survey non-farmers across the state and sample sizes are pretty big. Getting close to a thousand. And the third party that does this for us, it's what they do. You know the margin of error were really really great on me. So, looking at those survey results year to year as far as how we're doing as an organization. Topics that are important and top of mind. Getting feedback. People's thoughts on things that we've done, or concepts that we've put out think those surveys have been really helpful, and seeing how attitudes, behaviours, opinions have evolved or changed over the years. So that's probably one of the, one of the biggest things that we do, as far as just gauging the success of our content and what we're doing as an organization in addition to all of the fun media retaps that you get from doing those other types of partnerships.

T: So that survey, do you have the same questions year to year or do you switch them up?

M: Nope we use pretty, we use same questions year to year because we want to be sure that we're having good comparisons year to year. Se might have one or two questions change but usually it's of a current event type of a question, but we keep the questions the same year to year. It's representative of the population. Both farmers and non farmers, so, it gives us, it gives us pretty, some pretty great results. Just as far as accuracy and comparisons over the years.

T: How does the content you share contribute to brand recognition, trust, credibility, loyalty, and authenticity in your opinion?

M: Anytime we put out content, our content always circles back to trust and reputation management and how does that reflect on MCGA as an organization so, that is incredibly top of mind with anything that we do. And that also relays back to some of the survey questions we actually ask as well is related to trust and reputation and those sorts of things. So, that's really important to us. As far as brand recognition we always try to use our logo and those sorts of things. But, it's important to us anytime we are sharing content to show farmers especially when it comes to consumers facing types of content is you know. People don't want to see staff. People don't want to see us. Whos a real life honest to goodness Minnesota farmer and their family you know. Showing farmers. Having farmers tell their own story. Share information do interviews. Be engaged and participate. So that, you know is really important as far as the credibility piece. And that goes back to trust as well because I'll mention our survey, but people have a lot of trust. They have very high trust in farmers. They don't necessarily have high trust in agriculture, but they have a lot of trust in farmers. So being able to have farmers share their own stories is really important we think and contributes to trust and you know brand and reputation and those kind of things.

T: So talking about trust and authenticity, are you concerned about transparency when developing content?

Meghan: Always. I think that people are smart. You know and especially when there's so much information readily available. You need to be able to share your story and be honest and be credible and be real about it. If you're not people are going to know. So, you know that's important to us too.

T: Do you feel that the content you're creating helps influence your efforts to build relationships with stakeholders? Why or why not?

Meghan: Yes. When I think of stakeholders I think of members. Our members. And you know it's important for us to be able to share what we're doing, what the board and council, which are also members, and farmer grower leaders. But it's important to be able to share what we're doing. How, for example, checkoff dollars are being invested. How that's helping our stakeholders, our members, farmers. So that's a really important piece to how we develop and share content. You know because our stakeholders are who we are and you know if they're not informed and know what's going on that's an issue. So being able to share content with stakeholders to you know do those sellback types of things is really important.

T: So, out of all the content you've created, what content have you found has performed the most successfully for you?

M: Yea. You know, I have to go back and kind of say that it kind of varies audience to audience I guess. I'm trying to think. You know I think one thing that has really resonated this last six months to a year was the content that we've been developing around our new strategic plan, and our organizational goals in that regard and being able to share that and actually what that means and actionable items instead of you know here's a great statement about your strategic plan, but actually here's how it's going to be implemented and here's how it's going to help you, farmer Bob, or you Susie from Burnsville, or whoever it is. So, I think that content and some of the feedback and results that are kind of tough to measure, just calls that we wouldn't normally get. Or meetings that you're invited to that maybe we weren't invited to before. I think that those types of things, those types of, reactions has been really really interesting. And a little bit unique at least since I've been here, so I think some of that sort of content related to our strategic plan these last 6 to 9 months has been a little, it's been an interesting response and it's been a different response but a good one, so I think that content whether it's been, and you know when I say content in

regards to that blog posts, media interviews, events, kind of run the gamut. There's not one specific campaign or something like that.

Interview #6

T- What is the purpose of your content, what is the content that you are creating

S- AMPI is a dairy farmer owned co op, so our primary audience is our dairy farmers. We have a variety of ways that we reach them. First, each year we publish quarterly printed magazines called, The Dairymen's Digest. That printed magazine focuses on co op specific news and investments, industry related headlines, fellow members stories, and again; it is in a printed publication mailed four times a year. Monthly our members receive a manager's message, it is a more time sensitive market update, snapshot of the industry and of their coop business. That too is printed and mailed directly to the members on a monthly basis. The third way in which we connect with our members is via our members only website. So once you visit our website members have the opportunity to log in, and they are greeted by a homepage where we can post news about the coop, or interesting headlines from dairy or national news that might have an impact on agriculture. And so the website really behaves as our most timely place to push content to our members. Other ways in which we deliver content to membership include through our field representatives, these are staff members who actually have one on one visits with members and they are making calls to their farm. And so they will do in addition to simply visiting with the member about any coop message that needs to be shared we also prepare what we call hot topics. They are quick one pagers of information. For example, when we launched a new milk pregnancy testing ability through our testing service, we created a hot topic about it. We have a hot topic about the coop's political actions committee, the coop's young cooperator program, just different member services that are offered by AMPI delivered in, like I said a one page front and back informational handout. And that's typically delivered directly by the field rep on the farm. Those hot topics are also posted through our website. The second audience I am concerned with, as far as creating content for is our customer audience. AMPI is primarily a private label company, so that means we make the cheese and butter that appears under several dozen different brands. And so while you won't see AMPI necessarily in the grocery store, you're probably purchasing AMPI cheese and butter, just behind a different brand. And so in developing those relationships with the customers, I am in charge of preparing marketing materials, telling AMPI's story in a visually appealing and informationally succinct way. And so we do that through both printed pieces and then with information posted through our website that our sales professional share with those customers. The third audience that I am dialed into, would be the general public. And that doesn't take as much of my time. But it's always a consideration. And so that would be primarily in our public facing website. That's where we post information about AMPI, the co op's story. I should also mention that we do utilize some radio in order to push content, go out and participate in different radio interviews. We don't do a whole lot of paid advertising on the radio, but I feel it is very important to stay in touch with our National Association of Farm Broadcasters. These are people specifically communicating with farmers and local radio stations, so I like staying in touch with them so they know that if they have a question about dairy, they can turn to me at AMPI and answer questions related to the coop's business specifically or dairy policy items in general.

T- So when it comes to all that content you are creating; how does your organization develop the strategy or how do you come up with a content strategy for the year or whatever that timeline looks like?

S- Yeah, I'd say it's really on a project by project or message by message basis. And so depending upon the depth and the breath of that particular project or key message, would determine how many people are involved. But, I'm very fortunate that the President and CEO of AMPI are very committed to communication. And all that they do, they really recognize the importance of effective communication amongst employees, amongst members, and so very very frequently we are in touch with how we want to make sure we reach the necessary audience's. So, we are a small team in the communications department in that it's myself and a graphic designer. And so working collaboratively now for over six and a half

years, we we know each other's style, we know the coop's style, and so we are able to kick out some effective pieces pretty quickly. And when you have the support of your leadership of the organization, it truly makes an incredible difference, and so I can't emphasize enough how fortunate, as the communicator of the organization I am, to be able to sit at the table with the leaders of the coop and really be familiar with business operations quite closely and intimately. I believe that helps me to best compile and deliver the content in a way that's really representative of the organization.

T- What do you see is the value in managing your own channels and content, versus traditionally relying on news media sources to communicate for your organization?

S- Well I think the information spreads so quickly right now that, any opportunity we have to make sure our message is the first message and that it is reemphasized in many different ways. So, for example we have a major project going on in northwest Iowa, we are going to talk about it in all those different avenues I shared, we are going to talk about it in our magazine in our manager's message, it's going to be on our website, in conversation with field reps, in all those different ways we want to make sure that story is very very similar. We're talking about why the project is happening why it's a good investment for the coop and for dairy, why it truly ensures a long-term market for members milk, and we make really really good cheese at this plant. So, I think when you can be as consistent as possible in your messaging, and you have that control by driving your content in the ways that we do, it's very impactful. AMPI is not present on social media, nor do we use social media to communicate with our audience. Largely because we like I mentioned earlier, are a private label manufacture of dairy products and so the customers that we sell to want to be able to you know control their message as they're connecting with their customers. And so, we have not been able to engage in social media. That said, I watch social media very very carefully. And take in the information that impacts our industry and could potentially impact AMPI. I feel that while some might say, why in the world is AMPI not on social media, every bodies on social media. I think that by not having a presence we are able to better maintain our brand reputation. In that we are not out there for people to very easily engage with and take down a negative road for example.

T- So that is a little bit about why it is valuable for you to manage your own channel, what does that mean for your audience members? People that you are trying to reach?

S- As far as how easy it is to get the information, or what do you mean?

T- Yes, so in comparison to the way that people used to get information, or you know still do, but with the vast amount of information that is available now at their fingertips, what does it mean for your audience members to be able to get information from you, versus a traditional media source?

S- You know one of the things that is unique for AMPI is that, dairy farmers every day, every other day, ship their milk to one of our plants and when they do that they have the potential to sign up for an alert once the milk arrives at the plant, and is tested so they can receive this text message from their coop telling them how much milk they shipped that day, the fats, the proteins, the other solids content. That information is also available online. So, it creates this really close connection to the member. So when they log into our website, so you can receive the results on your phone and or you can analyze the results on our website. And when you log into our website before you get to your dairy, you see the AMPI member homepage first. So, that is where we can capture that audience and share any time sensitive information with them. And so I feel like those, tools you know their phone in their hand, smartphone that they do have, the ease at which they can access the website, they know that there just a couple clicks away from finding information pertinent to AMPI. And then also having that actual field rep connection, a person they know that they can call ask specific questions of, you know having that person's phone number, you know, just a quick dial away, I think is important as well.

T- How does content development fit into organizational goal settings and other communication objectives?

S- Well, let me see here, we typically meet once a year to set our goals for the year. And in doing so that meeting involves both our human resources department and our member services department. And when I was talking about audiences earlier I completely failed to recognize our employee audience. I apologize about that. AMPI has about fifteen hundred employees. So They are another very important audience that we consider when we are putting together our materials. They receive everything I just said- they have

access to the website, they have access to the magazine, and the manager's message, but a piece that we publish specifically for the employees is a quarterly newsletter. And in there, there is more specific information pertaining to employment. And so yeah, I just wanted to make sure I got that in there. So we meet annually with the HR team, and the member services team to get a handle of major projects and the horizon that our department needs to be dialed in to in order to plan for. You know, one piece of employment information, at the end of the year we always have the open enrolment time period, and that is where we need to make sure our employees are aware of if there is any change in health insurance benefits or if there is any change in financially planning. That is important to communicate at that specific time of year. So, our annual meeting is a good time of year to set up a calendar of sorts, always knowing that it can roll with it as it were. We also have monthly project meetings where we just connect and touch base on the projects that we identified for the year. We utilize Microsoft outlook notes features in our department. We like to share notes so that we can track project progression. I think that is key and I enjoy that a lot. Notes are so very important.

T- What is the relationship between your editorial calendar, your business goals, and some of your communication objectives and strategies? So similar to that question, but more so focusing on the editorial calendar and less on the content development.

S- Okay so, we are incredible routine here, we have a very regular annual cycle if you will. And so you can plan for things accordingly. And so I guess to go chronologically in the first quarter of the year we're working on are first quarter issue of the magazine, and the first quarter issue of our employee newsletter, and we are also working on the coop's annual report. That is another very key piece of our publication items. And then, that is also a time of year where AMPI hosts division meetings. Divisions are the middle layer in the coop's government structure. So the first layer, is district, so that is the closer tighter my neighbor meeting, divisions are multiple districts, and then the top layer is our board of directors, and so they have been elected by their division. So the first quarter of the year is our division meeting. Then we end the quarter with our annual meeting. Which is all members are invited to that. But definitely elected representatives within the coop. The second quarter, much of the same just no annual meeting. And then we're typically transitioning to talking about summer projects. So, giving our location, a lot of project that the processing plants do have this during the good weather times of the year. And so that is also the time of the year that I am out taking pictures on farms, taking pictures at our plants, trying to assemble as many of my editorial pieces for the magazine as possible because those pictures tend to be better than a picture taken in the deep of January. And so, kind of build up a bank of stories and ideas for the magazine. Right around July you will have the second division meeting of the year, so there are two division meeting. Then comes, again in third quarter we'll do another magazine, another employee newsletter, by November our district meeting. The district meeting provides an opportunity to review highlights for the coop for the course of the year. It is almost a preview in many ways of the coop's annual report. It's a good time in November to kind of assess what the market did, throughout the year. And we go out and we do those meetings one on one. There is a presentation. We do a lot of presentations in our world here. I feel incredibly comfortable with powerpoint. The beauty of a presentation, how often it can be massaged or reworked, once we spend a lot of time on one presentation for example, we can use bits and pieces of it in many different ways for many different audiences. So if I'm working on a presentation for member, for a member audience there is a high likelihood those messages will translate with presentations for customers to. By the end of the year there, we have those district meetings in November, and another issue of the magazine and another issue of the employee newsletter. A very regular cycle.

T- So, customers/consumers want more information today, are you feeling more pressured to tell your story?

S- So, the dairy industry as you know is a checkoff funded opportunity. Right, so dairy farmers can invest in checkoff and invest in general industry promotion. So really, even though the staff at AMPI, myself and one person wholly communicate the importance of dairy, really I regard the dairy farmers money going to the checkoff as an extension of our promotion team. Right? So, what they put together and what they are able to publish, and what they are able to share, we definitely utilize hear at AMPI. So, I was talking about the checkoff but you are going to need to refresh my memory. What was the question again?

T- So, consumers or customers want, are you feeling more pressure to tell your story?

S- Yep, okay, very good. Consumers and customers. So, the checkoff produced material really help us to respond to questions that we might receive. So our primary audience, is our customer, not necessarily the consumer. And so AMPI sales team knows that they can call upon our department on questions regarding animal care. Care for the land, are there hormones in my milk, how are these animals raised, like these are all questions that we are happy to visit with our customers about. I would say that yes there is more pressure, to respond to those questions. The National Dairy Farm program has provided a good, unified way in which the industry can respond to those questions of customers. Had we not as an industry moved forward, with the farm program, without a doubt Theresa we would be doing hundreds of different evaluations on farms. Because each customer would have come out with their own animal care program that we would had to complete on our dairy farms. It would have been an incredible load to try and carry and an incredible amount of money to try and execute. It is incredible important that we were able to unite around one animal care program in order to answer questions for our customers in that way. In the same way we are getting questions about sustainability, and environmental stewardship, and definitely more questions now than ever before. So I rely on information made available by the innovations center for U.S dairy, Dairy sustainability alliance, to help answer those questions. And again develop, we are working on developing a uniformed score card if you will and tracking, program in order that if a customer does have a question about how sustainable are you. How are we as a dairy industry, what metrics are we going to provide to show what we are doing. I think it is, again very important that we are united in how we are going to report what we are doing these regards and so, by doing do, are conversations with our direct customers, you know I hope that information goes the next layer to the consumer, so really communicating with the consumer, I see more as the checkoff specifically is geared toward the consumer audience, Where Sarah's audience is more specific to the actual customer buying the cheese and butter from AMPI.

T- Do you do any, cause you had mentioned you know, with those customers that are buying the cheese to sell, or the butter for example, are you having to do any type of story sharing with them in order to continue to build a relationship with them to try to convince people to buy more AMPI cheese? And if so, kind of what does that look like?

S- Yeah I'd say it's rather informal, we regard relationships incredible importantly hear, and so many of our customers have been AMPI customers for decades, so that is a relationship that is just not born overnight. We're also always looking for new customer opportunities to sell cheese and butter. It's amazing to me though how at the end of the day everything comes down to price. And that is really unfortunate because I think that what we are making is beyond commodity cheese and commodity butter, we are a coop and our coop has a really cool story to tell because we are a business owned by the farmers. And so what better person to buy from and support than a farmer owned coop. And so I believe and I want to believe Theresa, that we are going to see more and more interest amongst consumers who will say we want you customer to buy more directly from the farmers and less from the big company. And so I could see some tides turning hear, coops will have more of a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Given who they are owned by, they are owned by the farmers.

T- So, kind of switching gears a little bit, how are you measuring and evaluating the success of your content?

S- not with any metric or calculator. I think we are measuring our success based on what we are hearing others saying about AMPI. I measure success by in a phone call with a member they will repeat back to me what they heard at the district meeting. You know what I mean? It is hard to quantitatively measure the success of our communication. We have done member survey's in the past and communication materials have always scored very high. So in that way I feel like we are going the right direction, but I don't have a, like I said I don't have a firm metric that tells me, how responsive was that press relief I sent out?

T- How, in your opinion how does the content that you share contribute to your brand recognition, and I know that you said that you don't have any social channels and what not, but, you would want brand

recognition with your farmers and the companies you do business with, trust, credibility, loyalty, and authenticity?

S- Okay so start that question over again.

T- Yep, so how does the content you share, contribute to insert almost every trending word right now. So, brand recognition, trust, credibility, loyalty, authenticity, in your opinion?

S- Yeah how does it?

T- Yeah. Does or how does it?

S- Yeah, does it or how does it. Yes it absolutely does. And how does it. I think it is so important to be authentic, and authenticity I believe comes from the people. More than any amazingly designed piece I can create. So I think one way in which AMPI you know lives its values and is you know, by the way our values that the board of directors and the membership that we worked on this past year and we have a new vision statement. We make the dairy products that make the brands. And we recognize that what we are made of as people just as important as what we make. So our core values are commitment to quality, a responsibility to others and a determination to succeed and they really guide us in all that we do. Those core values are very much I believe part of being authentic and so I want to hope that in any interaction a member has whether it's our magazine, one on one visit with a field rep or with myself or even our co-CEO's. that they walk away from that experience feeling like, oh yeah these people are genuine. I mean, they are naturally genuine. So, the old statement about when you meet someone you may not remember what they said or what you learned but you will always remember the way they made you feel. That is kind of what I think is so important in our world. I want to make sure people feel the AMPI culture and that's a commitment to those things I shared.

T- Are you concerned about transparency when developing content and how do you address those concerns?

S- Oh absolutely, I think about the person who, who know anything I, anything we produce out of the office here, we know it is not, it has the potential of not just being by the person it was produced for right. So any letter that we send to our membership, I'm very cognoscente of the fact that that letter could be shared on social media. So you want to be as open and as honest as possible and yet very aware that it could be share, and so we try and be as clear and concise as possible, easy to understand, communication, that is black and white there is not gray area so that is can be misconstrued. And in many ways, while I enjoy a good sarcastic comment now and then, there is no sarcasm in our writing. It just does not translate. And I love humor I love a good time but it is not anywhere in our publication. Very factual, very focused communication. Because you have to know with the use of technology a message created for one person could be share by ten or hundreds for that matter. We want to be open and honest with both our members and our employees and with our customers as possible. And especially right now when so many people do want to know where their food comes from. I do believe that transparency is important and I love the fact that dairy has a good story to tell. So, I am very comfortable being transparent. Realizing that there are people out there that want to take advantage and twist messaging in a way that benefits their ideals, and it could be detrimental to ours.

T- Do you feel like the content you are creating influences your effort to build relationships with stakeholders?

S- Yes, should I elaborate? Yes I do think it does. Yeah.

T- What type of content has performed most successfully for you in your mind?

S- I wish everybody would go to our district meetings. I think there is nothing better than hearing someone and seeing information that is, interesting, so I really wish more members would attend our district meetings because I think they would find the presentations we prepare for those to be very insightful, very on top of industry. Both trans and news items. We're very engage in the policy conversation. A good update of what is going on in D.C. that impacts you on the farm. Any time you can communicate vocally I think it just really resonates with people a little bit deeper than reading a story in the magazine. So while I know that members enjoy the magazine, and we have heard it for years, I think the value out of a good presentation is still important. And so much of what we cover in our presentation I'll incorporate as a story in the magazine as a way to make sure we reach as many people as possible. But

I really love when we can get to the annual meeting and have a really rich presentation for people. I find those to be very effective. I love speeches, I love visiting with people, I love hearing their questions, because I think it is a good gauge of what is on their mind. And once you hear what their thinking then you can, I don't want to say cater, but in many ways identify what is important to them. And so when you know what is important to them then we as a coop can deliver not what they want to hear, but what the coop's doing that aligns with their values. And so anytime you can have a conversation and I think it is just so important.

T- And so if you would pick your second favorite piece, you brought up the magazine, would that be, you know if you can't be there in person and you can't present information, is it the magazine that is next or what?

S- Yes, I would say the magazine. Just because actually people are getting fewer and fewer magazines these days because they do turn to online news sources for their information. And so I think when the Dairymen's Digest comes in their mailbox I get calls and comments about it. I think they do stop and open it up. It has good pictures, it has short easy to read stories. They don't have to flip from page to page in a newspaper to complete the story. There is no advertising what so ever in our magazine. It is all about AMPI co op their fellow member owners. It's just void of any noise with advertising. And so I think it's kind of just relaxing piece that you can read when you want and you can actually physically hold it. And I think people are drawn to images. And so the magazine allows us a place to print photos that tell more of a story than I could in a thousand words.

T- Knowing that a magazine can't be as timely are your content in that designed to be more evergreen for those that get it?

S- Yep. Yeah for sure. Typically when I am planning our pieces editorial in the magazine, it is going to include a recent coop investment project. It's going to include a customer profile, it's going to include space for a policy update. So what that policy update might be changes based on what is going on in D.C. But typically anytime you can talk about trade or farm bill, or immigration, or right now the dairy pride act those things are good to include in there to. And then of course our calendar of events for the coop. We want to make sure people are aware of when the next meetings are. We have a great young cooperator program so that is for any AMPI members under the age of forty. We have a summer tour coming up in June that is a really cool event that has really high ratings. I am sad that I didn't talk to you about that sooner because that is something that we are really proud of. We have like gosh, about one hundred or so who come to that summer tour each year. It is a family event and they really enjoy it. And it is a good time for fellow young members to connect with one another, at similar stages in their life, with their children, maybe they recently took over the farm, maybe they are working on taking over the farm, they have so much to share with one another so that program has really been solid for the coop in the structure that we have had it. We have had it in this structure for about ten years now.

Interview #7

T: When it comes to developing content, what do you hope is the purpose, or why do you develop content?

L: We develop content to really share the stories of our farmers and to explain in fun, unique, and creative ways how, and accurately, how turkey production, and when I say that I mean how modern turkey production works in our state and amongst our farmers, so that is certainly one priority and probably our main priority. We also realize we are an education source for a lot of different groups so some of our content is more consumer focused and dives into food safety, preparation in the kitchen and cooking methods, and recipes, but mainly when we are talking about content it really is to share youthful, accurate information that kind of opens up the barn doors and lets people in so they can see how turkeys are raised

T: So how does your organization develop its content strategies?

L: We have a committee that we call the, it has a huge title but, Issues Management Communications and Outreach committee and that includes about, I want to say 8 to 10 organizational members and we use

that group to really kind of plan our strategies for the year. They meet in person probably once a year for sure maybe a couple of times, but we utilize a lot of email communication back and forth with that group as well. So initially, I guess some of the ideas, and the ideas for content, and the ideas beyond that come from staff. They may come from myself or they may come from other staff people, but then we talk through those ideas and the content with that committee and we kind of fine tune things, really almost all year long actually, but certainly during that initial planning stage earlier in the year and so that committee gives us feedback and we kind of go from there and the content is drafted, tweaked, written etc. by staff and really kind of disseminated from there. But we use that committee mostly to help us kind of fine tune and hone in on our messages.

T: So what do you see is the value in managing your own channels and content versus relying on traditional media sources to communicate for your organization?

L: Good question. Well for us as a smaller organization developing content like this and being able to be in charge of our own channels really gives us the opportunity to craft exactly what we want to say and share it in ways that we feel are the best ways to share. It just gives us ownership and all of that and we don't necessarily want to rely on an outside source to tell our story. We want to tell it ourselves, really is what it boils down to. So it lets us control things certainly, it offers us, because of our smallish budget, it offers us opportunity to have a bigger impact without breaking the budget, I guess is what you would say. It has opened up a lot of doors for us and we have been able to communicate and converse with consumers through our channels directly and we like that. So that is kind of where we are at.

T: So what does that mean for your audience members? You know you communicating through your own channels versus relying on traditional media. What does that mean for your audience?

L: Well that means they literally are hearing from farmers directly, really. They are seeing photos, they are watching videos, they are reading content that truly are the words and the stories of the farmers directly verses having somebody, say in a traditional media format, interpret, maybe interview, interpret the story and the pictures, so you know in those traditional media you are kind of seeing it from the eyes of that person that is interpreting, or the photographer that is taking those pictures, or the videographer that kind of thing. Whereas when we can kind of come out there and write our own stuff and disperse it through our own channels it feels much more like a true direct connection to food and farming I think.

T: How does your content development fit into your organizational goal setting and other communication objectives that you may have?

L: In our organization we look at communication as a key kind of component or I guess a major pillar that touches almost everything we do. So our organization has a sort of, I don't know you wouldn't call it a strategic plan, but it really is a working action plan for the year and it has several pillars that we focus on and those range from research, to government affairs, to outreach, to governance in terms of memberships in the board of directors and all of that, and then some other things too, but the communication part of it and the content hits every single pillar that we do. So if we fund research on a turkey health issue, or turkey nutrition, or something like that, that is content that we use not only for our members, because it is important for them to know what that research found, but we may use that and repurpose it to the general public because they want to know what are turkeys eating and what are turkeys not eating that kind of thing. When we plan for the year, communication is definitely a part of every strategy, and we do that on purpose

T: What is the relationship between your editorial calendar, the business goals of your organization and your communication strategies and objectives?

L: I'm laughing because you know "editorial calendar" that's a good one. And I'm laughing because I mean you know in our office I'm kind of a, we are like a, well we are a small office of five. So I am the main communications person and I do have someone here who kind of works on communications part time along with some other things she does. So we struggle a bit sometimes, I'm not going to lie, when it comes to editorial calendars and getting things scheduled out and all of that so it is not always our strong point because we do so much and it doesn't always happen. But it does, I'm not saying it never does. I would say we look at our goals for the year and we go through that action plan, and that's when we really map out okay, under communications and under sort of that editorial calendar, we map out probably I

would say five to eight major priorities for the year in communications and outreach and those can be the same every year or they can change it just depends. We look at those and try to focus our time and that calendar on getting those priorities done and kind of work everything else in between. I'm not sure if that answers your question exactly but that is kind of how we do it.

T: So consumers want more information. Are you feeling more pressure to tell your story?

L: Yeah I would say for sure we feel that pressure, absolutely. I don't necessary think it is a negative pressure, but we do feel very strongly that we need to be, as an organization and our members, we need to be out there in front kind of showing and sharing where turkey comes from and how it is raised because we know that the world has changed and consumers aren't close to farms anymore, they are pretty far removed from that world. So we definitely do feel that pressure. But generally our organization kind of understands that and I would say we have much support from our members to make sure that we are doing that and to do more of it really. So we don't really view it as a negative. We want to be out there and showing people. So yeah bring it on. We want to open the barn doors whenever we can I guess. It is not always easy but we want to do that.

T: Continuing on with that, in what ways are you telling your story? I know you mentioned a couple examples above, but maybe delve in a little deeper there.

L: Sure. Well A couple ways. We have been working really pretty hard to delve into videos a little bit more; I would say over the two to three years. We have done two kind of more comprehensive day in the life of a turkey farmer videos the past two years and we are going to add a third video this summer. You really meet a turkey farmer, you meet their family and they kind of walk through their day and you get inside the barns and you listen to them talk and they share what they do. Every turkey farm is a little different and every farmer has a different story, so each of these videos, I think, kind of shows the personality of that farmer, which is great. So that is one way. We have done some other video projects including one we called turkey farming 101 and those are really short snippets, maybe like a minute a minute and a half each, and we did I think a dozen if I recall right that shows every major stuff from baby turkey to heading to market essentially. So that is another way that we are trying to show that process. We just started a blog for our website, minnesotaturkey.com back in November. We debuted that right before thanksgiving. We currently have 3 farmer bloggers that blog for us every month. That has been an awesome way for them to kind of talk about what they do and share what they feel is important and what they want people to know, so that's been exciting. And we kind of house all those things on our website and then use social media including Facebook, twitter, Pinterest, and YouTube really to try to bring all those pieces together as well. And so we are on Facebook and twitter on a daily basis sharing that kind of information with our fans and then we use Pinterest more a little bit on the production side, but probably more on the food side. And not as regularly, but we use it for sure.

T: Do you have a newsletter that goes to consumers?

L: We do not currently have a newsletter that goes to consumers, no.

T: How are you measuring and evaluating the success of your content?

L: Yeah that is a great question and one that I kind of struggle with for a few reasons. I certainly try to analyze the analytics behind the scenes from our social media accounts, so I look at those numbers and try to interpret what they mean. I look at google analytics from our websites and I do share those numbers with our communications committee that I mentioned earlier. We do try to review those a couple of times a year. But I will tell you we struggle really hard to find the time, I think really, to pull all that information together on a more regular basis. I mean, I know I should be pulling it probably quarterly for sure, or maybe monthly to try to track more trends, but I simply don't have the time in the day to do it. We have multiple organizations here and we have multiple social media accounts and it becomes very overwhelming, really, but we do our best and again we do show those numbers to the education committee and we do report some of those numbers back to our board of directors; we don't want them to in the weeds about things, but we do share some of that. We look to that education committee and to the board to explain what we do, we explain why, we show them the numbers, and then we talk through,

“okay, was it worth it, was it not worth it, did we like it, did we not like it”, that kind of thing. Some of it is feeling around and trying to see what works and what doesn’t work. So there is a bit of that too.

T: How does the content you share contribute to brand recognition, trust credibility, loyalty, authenticity, etcetera, in your opinion?

L: Gosh, well, I think our content contributes to all of those things. I guess the first thing that popped in my head when you asked that, I look back to the year that our farmers struggled with highly pathogenic Avian influenza, so the really bad nasty bird flu outbreak we had back in 2015. That was a terrible time for growers certainly and for the industry, but we were open and honest about what was going on and what had to happen with millions of birds. Up until that point we felt like we had built a pretty good base, I guess, on our social media channels of people that like us and that were following us and that we're certainly supportive of what we were doing and that really showed that year. And because we were honest and we were pretty transparent, and we talked about what that outbreak meant to the farmers and we didn't just talk about numbers and finances we truly talked about some of the emotional impacts of that. We just really had a tremendous response of people that were very positive we're sharing with us, and felt trusted in what we were saying. So ultimately through that outbreak there was a level of trust in people that they just felt like, okay the farmers are doing everything they can and here is what is going on, and we are behind you and let's get back to eating turkey and let's support these guys and gals. I just look at that experience and how important it was to be out in front ahead of that and kind that build that rapport and use good content and strengthen your social media channels. It meant the world to us and was huge to go through an outbreak like that and just see the level of trust that was there and that people really knew that we were being real with them.

T: Well this next question kind of relates directly to what you are talking about. Are you concerned about transparency when developing content and how does your organization address those concerns?

L: Yeah oh yes absolutely, we think about that quite often. We know we need to be transparent, but as any farmer would tell you there are awesome things that happen on the farm and then there are the yucky things that happen on the farm. What do we need to show, and what do people want to see, and what do we need to let them know about, but what's maybe not appropriate. Some things are just hard to explain, but they need to be explained. So it is a tightrope that we walk quite often and it can be challenging. Sometimes we just want to not have to talk about the bad stuff. There are some hard lessons that sometimes you have to talk about. It is something we consider all the time with content. I think some days we are better at it than others. Generally we just try to, when that happens or if we are thinking about what we need to be sharing, we just talk through it. We talk through, okay pros and cons and what do we need to be saying about this. And sometimes we will bounce ideas off of colleagues and people that we trust and that helps us too. We definitely think about the challenges of transparency as well as the positivity of it. It is a balancing act for sure.

T: So do you feel like your content influences your efforts to build relationships with stakeholders?

L: I think so. I mean that's certainly part of what we are doing here. Stakeholders, whether they are legislators, or depends on your audience. We definitely want to be able to influence, or at least share what we believe to be important keys to our farmers being able to farm, to be able to go about their businesses. There is no doubt that we utilize content in that way, absolutely.

T: What type of content has performed most successfully for your organization?

L: Right now, and probably anytime, we are seeing the content that truly shows how farmers are raising their turkeys in their barns is performing really well for us. So whether that is the videos that we do or most recently the blogs that we are sharing from our farmers where they write about, “here is what is going on on my farm this month. This is happening, we are cleaning out the barns but guess what this is not just an easy clean this is how we do it.” They are getting into some of those details and they are sharing photos and sharing videos of their families and we are seeing that content perform quite well for us. People are reading it, they are commenting on it, they like it, they are sharing it. That is what I am seeing right now that is working really well for us. Part of that may be, I think, if you look in the past there were not many turkey farmers writing blogs or writing about what they do. We felt like that was a void out there in social media and in the blogging world and on websites. As you know, I write a personal

blog and write often about poultry and kind of agricultural topics, but I am coming at it from a totally different angle; I am not a turkey farmer. There just aren't that many people out there writing from their farms and that was a void we thought that we could fill and we could fill it well. So far it is working and I think that is the content that people are really interested in right now.

T: In that answer you talked about the stories from the farmers, do you feel the blog is the most successful medium to share that, or what is the best medium that your content has performed well on?

L: It is a partnership. My gut feeling is the content being shared right now on Facebook is the best place where we have seen that content really take off and get in front of people. Now, I will say I haven't looked at the blog numbers recently so I can't really say. It is not like people are not going to the blog I just haven't had time to look numbers recently. So I guess I will just say from my experience in the last couple of months, I think the content is important to live on the blog and it will live there forever and I think in time that blog builds an audience and it will probably take a little bit longer, but as long as you do the right things with SCO and all of that stuff then people will find that blog. But right now when I am sharing that on Facebook it is doing quite well without us having to pay a dime to get it out there. So right now we are happy with that.

Interview #8

T: So for Minnesota Soybean what is the purpose of your content and what type of content are you creating?

D: Well that is kind of complicated because I work for two boards obviously.

T: Yeah you can reference both boards or just pick one, it depends on what you're comfortable with.

D: Well I will talk about both, but ultimately our content is based off our strategic plan. And our farmers, about 5 years ago, chose to start concentrating more on farmer communications. There was concern that our farmers didn't really know what we did. So when we are creating content, depending on the channel because it is different for every channel, but our ultimate goal is, well take the checkoff for instance with the Minnesota Soybean Research and Promotion Council, our ultimate goal is to be telling other farmers what the checkoff is doing on their behalf. What kind of research we are doing, what kind of markets we are trying to open up, what kind of new uses we are creating for soybeans. We want to show them that that money is being used to make them more profitable. With the growers it is a little different because they are doing all the lobbying and they are trying to build their membership base, so not only are we trying to show that the Minnesota Soybean Growers Association is out there lobbying on their behalf they also want to try to show a lot of our successes. So content in that case might not always be like here's six successes but it might be here is the success that we had and here is what you need to know about the story of how it happened. In all of our content one thing we really try to drive home is that human aspect kind of relationship. That angle is really important to us. People are more engaged when they feel like they can relate to the content at hand. And for farming it is easy to put that research and everything out there and yeah I can relate to that because I do this on my farm, but when they start seeing people that look like their neighbor that are doing things or trying new things, or have a unique story to tell, that kind of stuff I call it "liquid gold", I call it gold. People read it, people share it, people talk about it, people engage in it. At the end of the day if we can get that kind of response we are pretty happy.

T: So, for both organizations how are you doing that is it a website is it newsletters.

D: The big push from the growers, well it is a series of things, our magazine is a big part of what we do. That is an opportunity for the Growers Association to obviously make money to help their efforts, but also to share stories of farmers, to share stories of lobbying. So that is an important angle, but it is also a place where the council can afford to buy in bulk space to tell their stories as well. Our magazine is a big deal. It has went up, each year I have been running it it's went up. We are probably went up about 2,000 in circulation; that was a big deal for us. That was our best year. The magazine is where we really try to carry out that human interest part of it and tell stories that have that human angle. And we are not trying to compete with any other magazine in the sense that *successful farming*, *farm journal*, *corrective farmer*

and all those types of magazines, they are going to be able to get into some of that research, maybe some of that agronomics stuff, and people are going to see them as a trusted source for that, we maybe don't have that ability even though we do have an expert in house and we have an expert at the U of M, a soybean agronomist, so we can tap into those sources, but we are not really built to do that so we decided a couple years ago to just try to tell really unique stories about Minnesota farming. The other ways that we share content is our website. We are posting stories about MSGA and MN Farm PC throughout the week. We share them once a week together in a joint newsletter. Much to the angst of the USDA and the united soybean board who actually oversees our checkoff program, they like to see everything completely separate; they don't want growers together they don't want council together on anything on anything we do except for this newsletter because we just can't think of a better way, and that's another thing we grew about a 1,000 this year in our readership so we just don't want to split them up. But that stuff that we put in miniline and the stuff that we put on the website we kind of treat like a newspaper or a news organization in the sense that its timely news, it's going to be old if we have to hold it for a magazine, get it out there. It is happening now. We support a lot of that with our social media. Christina Patsche (idk if that is right for her last name at 6.30) is our social media manager now since November, since Lauren took your old job. And she just hit the ground running and has loved doing it and I can't say enough about it. What I enjoy about how she has taken over that is she is drawing engagement so when we have a story that we share digitally from soybean business or from miniline or from our website, she is able to get the reach out so much farther because of the way she is handling our social media. And in the past we just wanted to grow who was following us, who was seeing us, how many likes we had and we have kind of stopped worrying about that and now we are just worrying about getting people to engage. It's hard, as everyone struggles with. It's hard.

T: Most of the content that you share in social links back to some existing piece that you did whether it is on your website or an article you did for the magazine?

D: Absolutely. Yup! We used to have a separate site for soybean business, but we don't anymore. We just have a page within our MSGA side of our website. So we post all our stories, well I shouldn't say all of them, from the magazine onto the website, news blog, news feed, whatever blog feed you want to call it then share it through MiniLine and then that also allows us to share digitally. Content is so key right, it takes so much time to develop content and then how do you use it and then reuse it and reuse it. So we are trying to get better right now at tank maintenance every winter someone talks about biodiesel and tank maintenance so we can just dig up an old story we did that is still relevant today and we can re-share that on social media. We are trying to become more aware of our content that we already have produced and making sure that it doesn't just live that one time that if it has shelf life we are going to keep playing it.

T: So can you dive in a little bit more about how you develop your content strategy? You talked a little bit about it is based off your strategic plan but what is that content planning process?

D: So for our magazine we have an editorial board. It consists of two farmers from the Minnesota Soybean Growers Association and two farmers from the Research and Promotion Council. And then it also consists of our advertising person we have here in house: myself and then another one of my staff, one of our writers here. We hold that four times a year, we just hold a call it's about an hour. We share with them the content that we have developed and I'll talk about how we developed some of that in a second here. We show them what we have for, let's say, the next three issues, and we ask if they feel that's on track if farmers are going to be interested in this information. We get cool stories from the farmers on this board usually saying "hey ya know I heard this story about this guy or this gal and maybe that would be neat." Then we will come back with staff and talk about what works for stories out of that what doesn't. The other content, as we are trying to develop stories, we rely heavily on our county reps who go out to our Soybean Associations to come back and share with us interesting things they have learned. They can also share with us some leaders or some people that are interesting so if we are ever going to do features we have options. We also have program leads that oversee all of our checkoffs and some of our MCA things. Like our director of public affairs, he oversees advocacy on the MSGA side but he also oversees the environmental stewardship from a council side because he is an environmental attorney. So we will go down and we'll talk to him and we will get stories, but in all this process each of

us, we have five of us now that work in Marketing and Communications staff here, and each of us is assigned to one of our sub-committees, where there is focus of production or marketing or new uses. So when we are a communicator for that team we are doing communication efforts for them and also drumming up content that we can share in MiniLine and Social Media, and in the magazine. We have a couple different calendars and if you know something is coming up you enter it in there and the person that's reviewing it can see "oh, there is this big event coming up I better make sure it gets scheduled for this many lines or this magazine." Would we like a yearlong calendar? I have this list, I have these two glass walls in here and I have a list that says "a yearlong magazine calendar, a yearlong MiniLine calendar." And it is hard to do, especially when we are always moving. I would say that we have a sprinkled in calendar for most of the year and we are filling it in whenever stuff is coming up. We are trying to assess if it has shelf life, does it belong in the magazine, does it belong in MiniLine, does it belong on social media? So those calendars are key because we are filling them in all the time. There is a lot of different ways that we get the information. The big people that are out in the country are the people that are on those subcommittees. So we have good structure to be talking to the people that have the ideas. Was that good enough? I was meandering.

T: So what do you see is the value of managing your own channels and content versus relying on traditional media to communicate for your organization? For example, in the past a lot of media relation was focused on pitching different news sources whether that was TV, radio, or what not, but what do you see is the value of owning your own and developing your own content versus relying on those traditional methods.

D: I don't think one could live without the other. What really works for us is that our MiniLine is full of media people in it, so even if we are not pitching directly, they are picking it up. Morning AgClips picks up our stuff all the time. My boss is always saying to me, "you have to send them some free swag." And I came from the newspaper world: 12 years in the newspaper. So I'm like, well I can send them free swag, but they are doing their job. It is kind of a catch 22. But they are getting most of their stuff from us through our channels of our content that we are creating; we are not pitching additional. So I think the challenge of becoming your own entity of news is credibility, and to create credibility to an outside entity because they are always going to see us as Ag and we are just fighting for farmers and we don't see both sides of it. That's a very difficult thing to do when you clearly have invented interests. Obviously growers and farmers have something to gain from us having our own content. Credibility is a hard, hard thing to overcome. That's why I say I don't think you ever get passed the earn media section of things of pitching because they are going to bring that credibility to your story. However, what we set out in our strategic plan to do is to talk to farmers. To say "we are here, we are working hard on your behalf. We've been doing it for a long time, we just haven't shared that story with you." So having it come from our own sites, our own magazines, and being picked up all these other places or being shared that's huge for us just because we know we are reaching our goal community. At the end of the day our number one community first and foremost is the Ag community and if we can reach them better by going to a third party and pitching and getting earned media we will do it because we are building that credibility. Now we are one of the players within the Ag community. I still think that the world of pitching is still there. I just think people may need to approach it a little bit differently. I very much believe in the short press release that has all the content, but I also know there are a lot of little newspapers that don't have any staff and if I can write a really tight very concentrated story for them that feels like a story like they may have wrote it, I think we are going to be successful. And that's really what we are trying to write for our own sites. We have taken a lot of the practices of the news world because that's where I came from and we've adapted them. I force my staff to write AP style, associated press, and sometimes they are like, do we really have to follow it? And I'm like, "somedays I feel the same way as you. So no today you can skip this one rule and we will make it a rule that that's the only thing we can skip." No, I'm very much an AP style user.

Oh absolutely. I don't see it from my staff. My staff is great. But yeah, our lobbyist will send in his thing for the week and the first thing I do is I go and find all the double spaces and I replace it with a single space. Yeah we have our issues about that. Creating content from your own spot is excellent because then

your farm group that's following you or your farmers know that you're doing stuff, right? I mean, if you are never speaking and never creating your own content how does anyone know that you're doing anything? I think it is very valuable. I think you do need both; both have to be robust. I also think that the days of commodity groups, ten years ago commodity groups could breeze by and do what they have always done, and it seems like each years things get more and more pretentious and people have more and more either regulations or opinions of farming and everything else. I think it is more important that every Ag group try to find a way to get to this place where they feel good where they have the staff to drive forward and to make a difference on behalf of whatever commodity they are representing.

T: How does your content development, and you touched briefly on this so we'll kind of circle back, how does your content development fit into your organizational goal settings and other communication objectives that you might have.

D: That's a good question. Well, I think one thing that we can look at, I keep talking about how we are focusing on farmers. With our organizational goals and strategic plans, we don't really concentrate a lot on consumers. That doesn't mean we don't invest in consumers; we do it through national groups that their sole purpose is to go after consumers. So right away that takes a lot of the guess work out of planning the content. We don't have to answer every crazy, non-GMO whack out there. We don't have to answer the person that thinks that because we are burning biodiesel made from GMO soybeans they are breathing in GMOs. I mean, weird, weird, weird stuff right? But it is a costly process and it is time consuming. But we can, within those organizational goals because our goals are very heavily towards, depending on what side you're on, it's either growing membership, growing your advocacy base. Everything that we try to do focuses back to farmers being profitable, doesn't matter which side or which board we are on. Let's say there are a bunch of crazies who talk about GMOs out there and they are actually making some sway and some persuasion. Maybe our story, because we are focused on farmers, is 'here's how you talk to someone who doesn't know.' We have several projects that we are working on, some of them that can't become public yet, but will become public in the near future. So as I'm looking at that, I'm going to the people who are overseeing these projects and saying, when are we going to start looking at public times? What's the first stories that we need to get out to farmers about these new projects? And then I'll start planning it in accordingly on the calendar when that's going to go. At the end of the day everything we do, our farmers, especially on the communications side the farmer that runs that particular subcommittee, strategic plan, strategic plan, strategic plan. Everything you think about is strategic plan. All of our content is based around things that could really help farmers be better, could be little things, big things doesn't matter, to be more profitable.

T: Have you found that focusing all your efforts on farmers, or really just relying on the strategic plan has helped you reduce the amount of unnecessary content that you have created?

D: Yeah, I think it has definitely given us a focus. It helps because there are a lot of moving topics in Ag you could be jumping all around. Sometimes I feel that there are good stories that are more consumer driven, but would read well with farmers. The other thing that's really important is just good sound news judgement. We have a good group back here that when they hear a good story idea or hear something that they know could spin into a story, that they are there listening and attaching themselves to that and coming back and talking about it. If you don't have a nose for news, you could easily get side tracked in all the clutter. I used to always tell people when I first started here, they wanted us to reply to every horrible letter to the editor and everything else, and there are some things that aren't news. Some quack has been writing about it and has brought it to light to maybe a third of the readership of that publication, but it's still not a story. The minute you reply to it and bring more light to it and awareness to it that's when it becomes that story. We are blessed to have the people we do here that can recognize when someone comes down and says, well I heard this going on and blah, blah, blah, they know it's just crap and I'm not going to follow that. Other times they hear it and they are like, you know that is really interesting I wonder if that should be a story. And then we have our communication meetings. We try to do them weekly but lately we have kind of failed at that. But we want to sit and talk about these topics and talk about what we are hearing and try to develop some of that content. The other thing is, a lot of

times someone will come down on Wednesday and we're trying to finish out MiniLine because we are going to send it the next day, we try to set a deadline of Wednesday, they will come down and there will be some breaking news. And there is nothing you can do about it. That's content on the go. He has spent a long time in the newspaper world. We have writers who can write breaking news really quickly and get good sources. It is a lot of moving parts. You can plan all you want and you can build your roadmaps but at the end of the day there is some reacting that needs to be done and you want to avoid it the best you can. See the problems or see the stories ahead of time so you don't have to react to them, but there is just no way to completely do that. And we have created, what I like to call this community, I always stress the writers that the farmers are our community and that's who the stories are going to be for. Because we have that we cannot fully plan for everything, it just doesn't work. It is about living and being within your community and knowing your people and knowing your sources. All that just kind of has to be there. If you're a one person communication office, your organization isn't doing you any justice because there is so much work to do. It is a disservice to the person because nobody can ever show their full talent, nobody can ever fill that role that is needed within the organization because you are wearing 50 hats doing a thousand different things never giving a 100% to anything because it is very difficult to give a 100% to a hundred things. So teamwork is really important to us. We do it together as a team. We all have our roles within that team. We all do a good job within those roles. And at the end of the day we still have a long way to go.

T: Consumers, farmers, people in general want more information. Because of that, are you feeling more pressure to tell your story?

D: No, I'm feeling job security. Yes and no. I think it's disheartening when you feel like you have done a good job talking about, let's say one subject, whatever that subject is, we'll just say biodiesel here because we are embarking on a huge biodiesel campaign right now. You feel like you've told all the good stories, you've had all the warm fuzzes, and then you realize people still don't know anything about it and they are not hearing it and they are not reading it. That question continues every day, how do I get the story in front of this target? We have lots of tools that we use to try to do that whether it's meltwater (25.47) or just simple analytics on social media or Facebook or google analytics. We have ways that can help us get closer to our marks, but at the end of the day if they're not reading what's in front of them how do you make them go that next step. There is a need for more news or more information and people are looking for it, but sometimes I feel like the people that need to see it aren't looking for it or aren't opening their eyes to it. That's the really hard thing actually. The other thing is the oversaturation of information out there for people. I'm not saying it's the right information, wrong information, because there is a little bit of both, little bit of column A and a little bit of column B, but there's a lot of information and how do you one rise above so that you're at the top of that information, but even if you're not how do you know that people are getting the right information. It's so easy to Google something and not look past the first page right because all the relevant stuff can be at the top, but how much of that relevant stuff is accurate how much of it is paid advertising. People don't understand when they're clicking on advertising versus just a regular web link. I don't know if you've ever heard the stat that 50% of the population, well more than 50% of the population has below average intelligence. I believe that heavily because when you throw out something that is right there in front of them that makes it so clear why product A is good or maybe practice A is the best way to do things people still just gets lost of them. That's the frustrating side of communications how do we keep telling our stories when people are just dumb. I don't know how much you guys use or analyze this stuff, but I've really enjoyed using meltwater as a service. We do have some communications that we pay Broadhead, you use to work with Broadhead, we pay them to do some of our council PR, but that still is just an extension of what we've already determined as to the top things to cover for the year. In August we'll look ahead to FY18 because that will start September 4th and then we'll sit with them and we'll plan and they'll take the lead on like our top four communications initiatives and that usually involves them going a little above and beyond. Like right now we just sent out a media kit to a bunch of newspapers and Ag based places that kind of promotes Replay. I don't know if you're familiar with Replay, but that's a Ag based asphalt product that's supposed to help rejuvenizes asphalt and make it last longer. We did a kind of neat thing that's been used a lot of places in Minnesota. We did

a scenic soy high what was it Minnesota scenic soy ways and it was a poster and it was all these different places that had used Replay, but it wasn't just that they were these places that had used Replay they also had weird landmarks in their town like Albert Lea has Pitchfork Pete. So we have on the map a little Pitchfork Pete. We have different ones throughout where these towns are that have used it, but along with that we also sent out our media release on that and driving people to an event that's going to happen this week, so we do a lot of our own content creation, but we also have help.

T: So, you touched a little bit on analytics, my next question is actually all about how you measure like how are you measuring and evaluating the success of your content?

I: Well, for the non-social media stuff we use meltwater. Have you used meltwater before?

T: I've heard about it, but for the purposes of this do you want to describe what type of information use this?

I: So with meltwater we do several things. We have now switched over to sending our press releases through meltwater. That allows us to see our open rates and how successful we are and kind of get a feel for who our best openers are. Which media we're reaching that always look at our stuff. Who we could do better with. Along the lines of meltwater we have different things that we can analyze. The big things that obviously everyone wants to analyze is what was our total reach, how many impressions did we get how many times was it placed in other magazine's publications etc. We can also take all those impressions and how many times it was played and we can get a value to it. So we can see kind of a ROI on it and that is pretty neat because like I'll take the growers for example. From January through May they had I'm not going to nail the impressions completely, but it was a lot sixty – seventy million impressions on all the different stories that they did and it was the equivalent of if we had bought that paid for those spots if would have been the equivalent of about \$700,000 dollars. So, for an organization that makes its own money via membership or sponsorship or whatever and does the lobbying you know it doesn't have the money the council does to spend on an extended PR contract it just has its staff and you know without getting too crazy into the financials even all the staff here mostly are council staff because MGA just doesn't have that the funds to do that. So \$700,000 dollars of advertising for them basically free advertising for them that's a huge huge huge deal. Some of the other ways we measure that is we try to measure what papers or what sources are using our content the most. With meltwater we can drum in and find out what journalist in Minnesota are writing about any soybean topic we choose to look. (32:18) We can see how many times they wrote about it. We can see how many times – We can check it in a year, we can check it in a small period I mean there's so many different neat things. You can do social listening on it. Which we do, but we've been relying more on our analytics straight from FaceBook, straight from Twitter right now just because that Christine was in charge of that she just forwards on a report to me, but we also know that we can see how we share the voice within all our content and right now I know that within the last month our share of voice has we haven't done as many press releases lately has been about sixty two percent social media and then about I shouldn't even say sixty two because that's not right because then there's another percent that's biodiesel social media so it ends up being like seventy five percent has been social media in the last month and the rest has been news. So whereas, we had a really busy news cycle back in March and April Mayish time that was more like sixty percent news forty percent social media, but we can see how the voices shared out there. We can see what words are trending, what topics are trending, how they've been positively or negatively impacted. We can see if the news that we shared and a lot of times like I was saying earlier our many lines goes in front of a lot of media so they'll just pick it up straight from our website and then we can see if that's viewed positively or negatively. It's amazing how many things you can do with it and we've only had it for a couple months now. I'm still scratching the surface of all the things we can do, but we can target influencers. So, when we announce that we're working with the diesel brothers we sent that was our first release we sent through meltwater and I think we had like a forty percent open rate, but it was neat because I could see which people just skimmed it, which people didn't open it, which people open and read and interacted with it so that I know those people that skimmed it I could come back with a follow up press release just for them or a follow up note saying hey you know I sent out this release blah blah just curious if we need any more information on it. We have the ability to do some follow ups

on it. It's a pretty awesome site to be honest with ya. Other than it keeps telling me the land has a zero impression rate so I have to go get it somewhere else. So meltwater has been the biggest communication analytic tool we've used outside of social media built in social media analytics. We do Google analytics a lot. We do that more just to kind of figure out what's driving our website, who's going to it, when we first started it we know that we had a very old demographic for who was coming to our website which we thought was very interesting and it was mainly male based and we did a campaign and this was probably about three years ago. We did a campaign to push to younger farmers and we did our numbers switch and we did see a big increase in female readers and young readers. We do know that the number one thing that drives people to our website is our blogs and our news posts because that's the most fresh content changes a couple times a week. So you know analytics they're great but they can also you almost need a numbers nerd to really boil down and figure out exactly what's going on but I highly recommend meltwater if you ever get that opportunity in life.

T: So what type of content do you feel has performed the most successfully for you?

I: Buffers. You want to know the largest story reach we ever had was....

T: So I'm looking for more less about topic more about.....like what the different types whether it's a blog or magazine. What is your most successful type?

I: That's tough. If you have to use analytics to measure it. Then we would have to say probably mini-line and our blog type stuff because we of our share and our reach, but at the end of the day our magazine goes out to 26,000 people and our mailing goes out to 4,000 people. Our e-newsletter, so I don't have an analytic I mean I do have I did a survey on the magazine this past year. I do know how people are reading it some, but it's hard to measure which would be more successful. You know I know that we've done some pieces in the magazine that have had great digital reach once we put them digitally have been shared and engaged with beyond what I could have ever hoped for, but there's no true measurement that's just my gut feeling on it. It's not this thing that's scientific about it. The blogs work really well with timely topics. So when I said buffers and I joked about buffers I know that anytime that I had anything out of where we broke down some of the buffer stuff it was amazing reach, amazing reach, best story we ever had was a story about crime, about some people stealing beans out of someone's bin.

T: Oh wow.

Yeah it was ridiculous the amount of people went to it. So it's hard for me to give you a true measurement I guess it was I'm saying because I think that we get more awareness from our magazine as far as our target of farmers in Minnesota, but we definitely can't measure it beyond knowing that it goes to those homes. I think what is lost in that maybe is all the content should have their own unique way of telling stories and they all support each other and we need all of them to be successful.

T: Agree. So my final question for you. How do you feel the content you have shared has contributed to brand recognition, trust, credibility, loyalty and authenticity in your opinion?

I: Well, I started here four years ago and I was a county person at the time and when I would go into the counties they barely took us seriously, they didn't look at soybean as a serious entity. I once had a former corn president, he was president at the time, tell me that we were just the red-headed step child and we should just fall in line. We embarked upon changing everything, changed our brand. We changed how we do our magazine. We changed how we do mini-line. We used to do mini-line when I started here as a PDF in an e-mail attachment.

T: Oh wow.

I: We've re-done our website re-branded. Re-branded our magazine. Created digital content online and built our social media content in the last three years and the final answer to that is that we're no longer the red-headed step child and those same counties that we go out to look to us first for the information. We now have media that actually contacts us and wants to talk to our people. I don't think there's a day that goes by that I don't talk to someone from the media. We've grown our staff because of it because we've had so much success. I would say that had we not built a robust in house communication plan using all our channels we wouldn't be where we are now.

Interview #9

T: So for CHS what is the purpose of the content or what are you hoping the content you create does?

M: Well I would say that if I can not complicate it but back up one further step it depends on the type of audience we are trying to reach. So

T: So you have different audiences?

M: Yeah we do, we kind of break it down into five groups and so we think about our owners or our producers as a key group. We've got a group that we consider influencers. We've got our employees as a key group. We as we think each of those audiences that we evaluate through it their eyes to say what would they need at this point in time, what do they need to understand? Or you know what decisions are they making? Versus us saying here's what we want to tell you. So we just try to instead of looking at it from our CHS perspective we try to get in the shoes of whatever we're thinking of.

T: Do you have any tools that help you do that or do you rely on, how do you determine that?

M: Yeah I would say we have a few different tools and then you know we are just really honest and candid and transparent and we want that for that feedback too. From the standpoint of more structured feedback we do with many of these influencers groups or stakeholder groups we call them is we would ask, we would do surveys with them. So we do employee surveys, we do customers surveys, so we take that insight from those surveys then and we help kinda determine you know really what is important to them and from kind of that feedback from that understanding from that really personal relationship that many of our staff have with these different groups or that we have with our employees. We've built out journey maps if you will, we've built out timelines so from corporate communications standpoint which is the one that the group that I oversee we take a look at the employees and we say, "Okay employees what do you need to know, what's happening throughout the year. What questions are you asking?" and so we've plotted two different timelines, we have a timeline for a year, so during a year what does an employee want to know, what are they asking. So we think about their benefits. We think about the different times for putting out financial results what kind of questions are they asking. When it get's to our job review season what are they thinking about. So we ask during that year long time period, what journey are they on and then we also think about it from the standpoint of what journey on during their career so what is onboarding look like? What is the sunset time in their career look like? What is the time when they are really active let's say in wanting to forward their career. So trying to think about it from the whole career standpoint as well. So we have taken it a couple of different steps for that specific audience. Does that kind of help give a little bit of a lense of how we think about them right now?

T: Alright so when it comes to those different audiences, you mentioned a little bit about the journey maps and timelines that you have for each of those. Is there anything else that goes into your content development strategy?

M: I would say either we have to be thinking about budgets of course, always doing something that goes into strategy planning sessions, I would think about our current vehicles. What ways do we have right now for getting information out, and then forward thinking what ways do we need to be getting information out. So constant evaluation of those vehicles to make sure they are the right thing that you know how do we need to evolve. I'm sure there are other things that I'm forgetting. That and staffing of course would be another one. So those are things we really want to guide ourselves by what our these different groups need to know but when you get to the world and being realistic you have to think about what can we do and so that is a current challenge that we are working through right now. You know what is a nice to have versus have to have and from a budget standpoint, a staffing standpoint and a vehicle standpoint what can we do and what can we do well. And then what can we work to enhance overtime?

T; So is that a once a year planning process or do you have regular meetings?

M: We do, we have lots of regular meetings, I would say the, our group meets once a week and we'll likely start to meet sooner or more often I should say. Sorry I'm typing a quick email here. I can't find the file I'm looking for so I'm just asking someone to send it to me quick. So basically they meet once a week right now and how we are doing it right now, it is an individual from each of the different groups that we have so how we're organized is that we're enterprise, marketing and communications. So we've

got marketing and communications both together in a group and we each serve a different, well there's some of us that serve different business, so like we have someone that oversees our communications work for energy, someone overseas if for ag, somebody oversees it for business solutions and so on and so forth and then we've got individuals that serve those business folk. So in other words if you can picture in your head, we've got these verticals which are the business that we are serving and the communications work we do for those businesses and then underneath that we've got these horizontal things like content, like events, like you know those kinds of different things that public relations, media, that serve and help each of those different businesses. So each of the businesses right now are meeting with the person that is heading out strategy, our content strategy area and they just do content standup meetings about what's happening, what information are we putting out and then it helps kind of foster understanding across all the different groups. And then there is obviously opportunities for us to take if somebody's working a project over in one business, we can leverage that content usually somewhere else too. So we all think about we're very siloed sometimes, everybody can be right, you think about what you have to have and what this purpose is for you but usually there's someplace else that somebody can use that and we find that true from a corporate communications standpoint. If our business is working on something and maybe it's got a really good business purpose, let's say we are in a community and we are helping with a safety day in the community because the energy group really thought it was necessary for them to do this big safety event there because we are going to put it in new location there and they want to community to know that we're really, we're focused on safety, right? We're a good member of the community. Well from a corporate communications standpoint, I'm watching that and going awesome that is great for energy and that is great for that community but golly but all of our employees are doing all that work, this is a neat employee story that we could share. You know we just have the focus a little bit to say, look at what our employees are doing. Look at how invested we are in our communities. So it's those kinds of meeting we all have different kinds of lenses we look through when we look through these different, you know when we stand in the shoes of these influencer groups or stakeholder groups so that really helps I guess leverage if you will. Every story as much as possible you know and it's more efficient but we've been so focused on just getting the job done in these different businesses that we haven't we just haven't done. We literally just started these content meetings in the last 3-4 months. That's how much we are moving that way and how quickly it is happening but still taking shape honestly. I mean look what you've doing, what you are doing with very small amount of people and that's here too. I mean we're a Fortune 100 Company for goodness sake and on my corporate communications team I have 3 people plus me. There are 4 of us total. So it is just that's not a lot to get after some of this stuff. So it's just being very smart with your time. And that's why I think this case for content is terrific if it is done right. That's my only thing. I want to make sure we are more effective in getting our out stories out which is what we are doing. And that is why content strategy makes so much sense because it is driven by your audience ... Because it is driven by your audience. It's just making sure that you are structured and set up in a way that that is your primary goal, right? And then you're able to really drive some things I think. But we're in that transition stage and it's challenging, it's really challenging.

T: Perfect, so how are you measuring or evaluating success for your company?

M: Honestly, we are just getting to that I don't know if we really have what I would consider a way of measuring that's really valuable yet, other than what we've been doing from some standpoint is just simply taking some metrics from when content is made available whether it be on our app. We have an app for C Magazine or our website, there are a series of websites that we have. So we do pull metrics from there to see just in general to see the visits you know the clicks, basically the click throughs, of how many people are reading it. We have open rates on emails and this like that that we are sharing. But the click through rates seems to be obviously more valuable. We can also look at the time they are spending on each of those articles as well and how far they are going into our website so it's better than how many click throughs are we getting, how deep are they going into the website, that tells us a lot as well. Beyond that I would say, I really, CHS, and you probably know this from your time in ag really driven by feedback too, so what we do is we do our survey's as we do, we have a lot of tables, really table conversations that we may bring a series of customers in for a round table and so we take that feedback to

heart and we try to capture that and quantify it as much as possible and use that to help direct anything that we do not just content but anything that we do. Those are just the basic things that we are doing right now I know that is going to be evolving, because we haven't evolved yet, we are in the process of getting there.

T: So what type of content, you know granted that this is a newer area or venture, what type of content have you seen this far that has performed the most successful for your company in your opinion?

M: Yes, I would say infancy. We've really seen a lot just in this past month, we've had leadership changes so we've literally, well the last couple of months we announced a new CEO, a new board director. We look at that information of what we have shared and we had some different, all very transparent all very candid, but we had different ways that we shared the information and stuff that came more direct from their mouths, so like 5 questions with this individual so more like a Q&A kind of piece. That performed highly much much higher in the numbers than what we saw compared to articles or news release that kind of thing. We've also found that as long as it's short media you know whether it be like a video or you know we do things like Brain Sharks and stuff like that, as long as they are short and really concise those get a really great play. Infographics also seem to drive people. Your pretty standard, right? Your pictures, your infographics, your multimedia. It seems to pull people in as long as it doesn't get too long or too cumbersome and then again, we're very much a face to face organization so I wasn't shocked by the fact that people really wanted to hear directly from our leaders. So, when we saw the five questions or the blog type style seems to be doing a lot better than you know those longer, more corporate-y speak pieces if you will. So, that's really the only insight I have to give right now but we are going to continue to evolve but we just want to get to a place where multi way, very different ways we are sharing it, you know whether it be podcast, photos, videos, you know we are hoping to get to a more multimedia look at things but just haven't gotten there yet.

T: So how does your, right now, or how do your invasions your content development fitting into your organizational goal settings and other communicative objectives that you might have?

M: Well I would, intracell, would be the simple word I would use that is really going to be a key piece of it because it's where we need to evolve and it is literally how we are talking about the future. I would say that it's, it just again I go back to the whole idea of making the switch over because that's where we're starting to think about staffing for it. How does that model look? We are just a few stages behind actually having something to talk to about we're more in getting the foundation kind of set for being successful so other than just really important key part of how we will measure ourselves and how we will be measured in the future I think that is pretty much all I could say to date but it is certainly in our short term and long term plans as an organization

T: The content is simple but to do it effectively actually takes a lot of effort and time.

M: Yes, that is a whole other chapter to this of what you are putting together is what structure do you put in place to best support something like this because man, we've had conversations around that a lot. Do you keep more silent structure focusing on you know providing business support and putting contact person into each one of those areas. Or do you have a content group that serves those areas, or do you blow up the group as a whole and really start to organize, instead of being organized by a business focus you organize instead around your influencer groups. So those are conversations we are having right now like how exactly do we get after this the best way possible. Like I said infancy I mean really infancy, of like let's just make sure we are thinking about this correctly, and there is not a lot of information out there that really describes that. So I'm sure you're seeing that immensely.

Interview #10

T: For Whole-Me what type of content are you creating and what is the purpose of your content?

M: Right now we're just really because we don't have much of a marketing budget we are trying to create and build a rather organic social media community that follows us and so we're creating content to really drive followers on our main social media outlets which are Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

T: Does that consist of photos, videos etc.

M: Photos, videos, contest and that is primarily it. We've also got a blog and a newsletter following.

T: What type of stuff do you write about on your blog?

M: We write about creative ways that people are using our products and recipes. Issues that we might be grappling with as a company. We are looking for insights into new product innovation. We might ask followers to share with us what they think innovative new products would look like. Those kinds of things.

T: So how do you go about developing your content strategy?

M: I have a part-time social media and marketing coordinator. She and I kind of sit down and in an ideal world we have kind of a content management calendar we've a system in place and we try to work about in an ideal world would be ninety days ahead, but we're working about thirty days ahead right now. Where we've got a basic calendar that we fill in in terms of content so that we can see when we're doing collaborative posts with other small companies. When we can see when it's National Almond Day and we want to do a call out for all the almonds that we use in our products so we plan our content on a three month rotating calendar and we also try to make that in sync with our sales calendar so that we know when we've got promotions going on at major retailers it all coincides.

T: Being a small company, what do you see as the value in managing some of your own channels in content versus relying on traditional media communicate for you organization? When I say media I say traditional media I mean when you send out a lot of press releases and hope that their company got coverage that way. Do you see a lot of value in being able to own your own channels?

M: Right now there's no other option for us. Simply financially because it's not a line item that we can utilize right now. We have done some sporadic investment in public relations and it's really given us less than lackluster results so I think managing it right now for ourselves is just much more effective. I think just because of the nature of our product people are excited about our product offering and so were able to authentically approach key influencers who might have you know 150,000 followers and they will do things for us at no cost. It's really super helpful.

T: So how does your content development fit into your organizational goal setting?

M: It fits closely in. It coincides with all our kind of sales. Since there is not very many of us it all kind of coincides so everything is kind of connected.

T: Are you feeling more pressure to develop content because consumers seem to want more information all the time? Does that add to the pressure to create content?

M: I've got a really awesome social media manager and she is great at it. She is creating new content and our followers create new content for us because they are posting about us on a regular basis, so it actually it works. A lot of what we post are re-post about what others post about us. So, it's fabulous and it just keeps growing so I think that is how we want it to work.

T: So you've developed a strong community of people?

M: Yeah, we have. They're really strong we've also got standalone ambassadors who do a lot of projects for us and part of them agreeing to be an ambassador means they're going to post about us on a regular basis so that helps too.

T: So how are you measuring and evaluating the success of your content?

M: You know right now we're doing it right now purely on the number of followers that we have. By the end of the summer we want to double our social media following and I think we might be on triple, so right now it's just simply based on that. We don't really have any means in place to be more scientific.

T: Can you give me a little background on when you started your company?

M: We started our company about four and one half years ago. We started in a handful of gyms across the Twin Cities and we've grown slowly over the past few years. By the end of this year we will be in about 2,000 retailers across the country. We really hope to double again next year, so last year we were

in a about 700. So we almost tripled in size this year in terms of our the number of retail outlets that we're available in. But we will probably double again next year.

T: Do you attribute any of that growth to your content or do you think your content has helped in any way shape or form?

M: Oh I absolutely think it's helped. I mean I think it's helping us get the word out in new markets where we enter where we can let people know that they can find us now in the Los Angeles area and then we have people posting about how awesome that is. So yeah, it totally helps us.

T: How does the content you share contribute to your brand recognition, your trust and credibility with your consumers in your opinion?

M: You know I think it shows that we have a versatile innovative product that consumers are using in lots of different ways and I think when we can post about creative ways of using it it just feeds trust in our general product. There's more that you can do with it than just eat it out of the bag.

T: Are you concerned about transparency when developing content? Are there transparency issues?

M: I can't say there are any significant transparency issues, no.

T: Do you see that with ingredients?

M: What do you mean?

T: Are a lot of consumers pushing for clean labels and more transparency on the ingredients that are in their products?

M: Not really I mean I think we stand behind our product we've got gluten free certification. We've got Non-GMO project verified. We've got all the kind of key attributes. Loud and clear so I think we're ok on that end.

T: Do you feel like your content has influence your efforts to build relationships with stakeholders? Obviously you built a community.

M: Yeah I mean I think definitely. I think because of the hipness of our content it probably continues to attract like-minded users. There's kind of a key demographic that's clearly our target audience and it just really helps build that.

T: What type of content do you feel has performed most successfully for you? Not necessarily you mentioned you're on social media a lot, but is there a certain type of social media content that is performing?

M: I mean our Instagram following is growing for us we're almost at 10,000 followers which is awesome. It's all been organic, nothing paid. Which I think is a strong testament and I think the content that really resonates right now is how to's like how do people use our product and so if someone is using it in a particularly beautiful smoothie bowl those kinds of posts usually get like 350 likes or 500 likes you know. Contest are big too. We like to partner with other kind of cool brands other kind of hip brands and when we do something jointly it's been super successful.

Interview #11

T: What is the purpose of your content?

L: Sure, well, the industry that I work in recently experienced some pretty dramatic growth and the consumers that we are targeting over the past five years have really started with a zero knowledge base and so what we found ourselves doing was being a source of information that someone could leverage as they got started with backyard poultry. And what's interesting is that as the industry has slowly matured, we are noticing the knowledge level of our targeted consumers is growing so they are becoming more educated but I would say like a few years ago the goal was to be a trusted source of information as people got started and now we've evolved into kinda the same thing and I'm really turn-key point where I need to be pushing content that is a little bit more technical, a little bit more in depth and something that isn't just a 101 level.

T: So you haven't started that transition yet or you have?

L: Yeah we are, I mean it is an evolution it's not like a one day change. But yeah we've started and it's a rock in a hard place because you want to provide content that targets an 8th grade reading level. So I mean we want to do that but we also don't want to talk to our consumers like they don't know the basics of chicken keeping. So, we're trying to slowly make an evolution and I struggle because I do know that since I live it and breathe it every day I do have to take a couple step back and say "okay not that technical." So that is one of my current challenges right now with regards to content.

T: How has the channels that you have used for that content changed as your strategy has evolved?

L: Oh that's a good point. Well it's so easy for us to put Facebook first and foremost because it is the largest audience and from a sheer volume standpoint it's just easier. Now one thing that we are wanting to leverage over the next year is so we use facebook as kinda our, you know we provide content there and maybe even some in depth. However, we have formed partnerships with Backyard Poultry Magazine to provide more in depth content Poultry Show Central .com so maybe places where there's a little bit more room for editorials we still utilize video on Youtube but we're finding ourselves keeping that video content on Facebook directly we don't do Twitter. I believe that there is a value for Twitter, like from a media relation standpoint but I'm not a huge believer in Twitter anyways. Instagram, we use as a brand tool we just for our Nutrena Feed Brand and we don't do poultry specific information. I just feel like Facebook really as developed as it is people can find their niche in Facebook and it's hard to do that in a lot of other social media channels. Actually you know what our blog is actually the hub of all of this. We've been blogging for a solid four or five years which is a lot for the backyard poultry industry and it has really given us excellent google search rank over the years often it is called Scoop from the Coop and.

T: Can you repeat that name?

L: Scoop from the Coop. Yeah so often times if you have a question about backyard chickens and you google it, we're usually in the top five returns which is pretty good, that's like nothing to complain about. So we use Facebook to push information out and drive them to like our content hub so like on our blog but I think we also partner with publications and websites to get more in depth content out there but also for us to appear specialized to certain audiences. I don't know if you're aware of this but there is a lot of people who are into showing chickens and so we provide content to Poultry Show Central .com and the American Bantam Chicken Association so it also allows us to position ourselves close to the real dedicated enthusiast versus the hobbyist does that make sense.

T: When you partner with some of these magazines is your editorial content branded with your brand specifically?

L: Yeah, Well, I think that's like a weird topic because I lose a lot of respect for publications who take branded content because I use to be an editor myself and so like Backyard Poultry takes branded content and I am so annoyed by it, like, we pay it essentially and I'm like that is so unethical it's not even funny, so to a point I kinda devalue that a ton, I'm just like this ridiculous that you're letting me, they try to edit it to make it educational but I just think it is wrong for me to pay for a two page article written by myself. I just think it is wrong. Do you know what I'm saying?

T: Yeah, but do you use that though? Like when you do pay for them?

L: Yeah, we have for the past year I don't think we are going to do it anymore, I just, I don't know I just have this like, our budgets were cut this year and I just think in terms of since we are paying for the space and not getting it for free, I just think we'll move away from it. Because one of the interesting things about the backyard poultry industry is that while there is a Backyard Chicken magazine or a Backyard Poultry magazine they only have 40,000 or 50,000 subscribers that's nothing compared to how many people have chickens. So it is more worth our while to pay for Native content through google or other ad networks. You know one thing that I think has changed is I just and this is maybe more of an opinion thing but we don't do a heavy email content push and maybe that is something I need to reevaluate but we have in the past and we do send out a monthly email but I should know what the open rates are off the top

of my head and I don't but I just believe people like facts and news and information to come to them they don't have to open up an email to find it. Does that make sense?

T: Yep, Does that email do you typically link back to your blog or the information you have on your website?

L: Yes, our blog and our website

T: How do you go about developing your content strategy?

L: Well, a lot, you know, one thing I forgot to mention is that a big part of a big thing that I am trying to get out of our content is that because we have so many I want to leverage our customers to help push out the content but also show it as a service to customers, so the fleet farms of the world, the Runnings of the world, etc. and so what we do is we develop an annual content calendar dependent on seasonal topics and products promotion, so like in the fall when chickens molt we have a feed that is specific on feather development you know that we talk about molt and feather health and how that relates to nutrition in the fall but we create an annual content calendar and then I meet with our two digital leads on a monthly basis to review the content calendar, make updates and then we have like the content calendar is very it's somewhat broad i think it goes down to two topics a month and then when we have our monthly meeting then we drill down to the individual topics and get more specific. So what we find ourselves having to do is having to market that content calendar to our customers to kind of show them the investment we are making in the products so that they carry them. Or continue to carry them or to show them "Hey during chick days you'll see this on our blog look at all this support we're throwing behind our products." Does that make sense. Because like my role is primarily to market to the consumer, but man do I do a lot of dog and pony shows for customers, I mean like with Tractor supply, I mean tractor supply is like an effort in it of itself, I mean they are a lot of work, but tractor supply has half a million followers on facebook and is 35% of our business so I guess it makes sense right?

T: Yep, And so have you seen companies like tractor supply or fleet farm share your content that you created.

L: Yeah, so actually with tractor supply we'll pitch partner content ideas so with tractor supply we've a couple successful Facebook Live educational events it was like us, tractor supply and living the country life magazine and then with like rural kings we've posted live Facebook chats so we in that situation we are the poultry experts we even do a service for a lot of our customers that we actually old fashion in store seminars still. That's changing a little bit to be more digitally focused events but we do offer that to our customers. One thing I find is our customer segment that like the individual mom and pop store like Joe's Feed Mill in New York if I can provide them turn key content like articles and stuff they love it because in those situations the owner of the store is the feed buyer, is the marketing manager, is the feed mill programmer, you know what I mean they wear many hats, so yeah absolutely when I and we keep our blog content very educational. Well and I guess yeah like I said we create a yearly content calendar that aligns with our business objectives and also species objectives you know species seasonality so we leverage those two things to create the content calendar. So the content calendar we consider number one what channel were pushing it out on website, Facebook, Youtube, what have you and then also content form and that happens last because I don't I try not to promise content forms but one thing I learned a long time ago is that too many people when they make content calendars when they assume everything is an article or a blog. And I hate that, because like I was there, you know, like 6,7 years I don't know how long ago, 5, 6 like 6 or so years when I was starting at Broadhead it was an article, it was a blog, it was an article, it was a blog, and people hate that, people don't read that, so that's our last decision, what is the form is it an infographic, is it visual, is it a video, is it a interview, is it a facebook live, is it a Q & A does that make sense?

T: Yep, Perfect so what do you see is the value in managing your own channels and content versus relying on traditional media to communicate for your organization? Like for example, back when media

relations was all about pitching stories to news people well now you have your own channels to push out content on what do you see for your company as a value for that? Or do you see value?

L: No, that's a really good question, you know to be honest, with the way the Facebook algorithm go I mean like unfortunately a lot of news outlets don't put money behind their content even though I mean it probably gets enough engagement, like I'm sure CNN or excuse me WCCO doesn't boost their posts and they are always at my newsfeed because they get good engagement but I mean we have full ownership, we decide how it is said, but I think it is like a big responsibility because we have to be ethical about it, and I just I because we take that responsibility seriously we aren't going to shove products down people's throats, I mean we want people to choose us because they trust us, and you know have shared values with our company. Boy, I mean I think there is a ton of value there but there is also a big responsibility to handle it the right way, I think it is very easy to lose customers that way too. Yeah and you know what the other thing is when you compare it to traditional media I mean are you even talking like doing this versus standard advertisements like a print ad or something. So I think from a digital advertising standpoint I know like over the past three years there has been a sharp decline in click through rates of display banner ads and almost to a point where like I think displayed banner ads are ridiculous and useless too because the click through rates are so darn tiny people are so used to seeing them, the only way you are going to get good engagement on something like that is if you, you know, have a, i don't know, something really bold in there, you change it on a regular basis, and a really strong call to action, you know like "win a thousand dollars" I mean really you have to be really bold and so I think people just like gloss past it, people gloss past content but I think like the more visual you can be, I mean video is so hot right now in terms of content you can get a lot of value out of producing a really good educational video I think nowadays more so than running a print ad in a couple publications for a couple months

L: and then you know one other thing is we've changed how our traditional media spin happens because people are so crowded with advertising all over I find myself wanting to do more high impact traditional advertising, so an insert, a false cover, a you know maybe if a sponsorship of contest in a magazine, you see what I'm saying?

L: People are inundated with media that you really have to think about how you're going to stand out.

T: So you touched on this a little bit in the first one but how does content development fit into your organizational goal setting and other communication objectives that you might have?

L: Yeah, well honestly our content development I kinda have a 50/50 mix like 50 percent is developed by people in house, we have a monthly blog call with sales reps that are really interested in poultry and then they write at least 50% of the content for our blog and then we repurpose that content to create other things like videos or lists or infographics. And then the other 50% and it might even be more like 60-40 is gonna be from either an agency helps us create or a hired outside blogger so our budget I mean, content creation is valued in our organization the budget for it comes from the same pot as our media budget we have what's called maintenance budgets and so we use that to maintain our brands and yeah I mean kind of the same pot. Is that kinda what you are asking?

L: What was the second part of the question?

T: Can you talk a little bit more about how the content you're developing could fit into your organizational goals for the company or your brand

L: Well I think you have to have a balance because you want to provide content that is really relevant to the consumer but that also accomplishes your goals for the year. We are kinda in planning mode for the year because our fiscal year just started and it is hard because it's like well spring is chick days for example well and that's a bad example because we spend a lot of money on chick day but Yeah like we will do content that's relevant around Halloween as an example but that doesn't really tie to a specific business goal or a company objective. Is that kind of what you're asking?

L: You know, in evaluating we are partnering with some new media agencies and we try to stay pretty, you know what actually now that I think about this one of the things that Cargill always talks about is being a very customer centric organization so honestly I feel like we really focus on customers like we focus on chick days and when chickens become layers during that time of year we are focused on layers, I would say we're very consumer centric and it's like we're focused on them first and then meeting our goals. I like to think we are pretty customer centric consumer and customer centric and then we also have to think about when our like when to do the corporate customers like Fleet Farm and Tractor Supply when do they need content so we end up having to create stuff way far in advance if it's going to be used in a partnership with them. Like I just last week presented a bunch of content ideas to Tractor Supply Companies for next March.

L: Because we need to pitch to them before they make their chick day plans to see if they want to leverage any of our ideas, to partner with us, so we have to work around their schedule.

T: Makes sense, so consumers they want more information, you talked a little bit about that too, but because of that are you feeling more pressure to tell your story to tell your brand's story?

L: Yeah, I would say yeah, consumers are craving a lot of information you know what it is I'm most pressured that everything is really solid content because they will critique us they will say something. We had a couple answers wrong on a quiz we did a couple months ago and oh my goodness, they noticed, the chicken community, they noticed when you got something wrong so I think it is more the pressure to have really solid content that you can back up really well. Like we did a series of videos that we developed in February and they're finally done and I like them I think they are awesome but I have this like self conscious like are they good enough? You know?

T: What was the series of videos on?

L: Well her name is Molly she like a character or an actor we hired and she just talks about raising chickens and she's kinda set up to be like our ideal consumer someone who is like in her thirties and like someone friendly and isn't like I don't know. She is just like a very friendly approachable person that is really smart and is like gonna research and knows what she is doing. So we used her as like the character in the videos and then she like talks through recommended breeds to get and predator proofing your chicken coop things like that.

T: And you said you had some Youtube content or some Facebook native videos that you have what does that center around. Like what are you trying to share with those?

L: We just any and all information so a couple years ago we did a bunch of very basic how to videos with one of our on staff experts, two years ago we did a bunch of infographics, this year I was like "Oh, I'm kinda sick of infographics" so we filmed this character in a studio I don't know what we will do next year but I think, my next direction is more low budget video not because of the money reason but because I just want raw really first hand content. Does that make sense?

T: So how are you measuring and evaluating the success of your content?

L: Well with the rise of big data we are asked to measure everything, like we, our business expects us to metrics on anything and everything, so anything I can get my hands on I will use, every Facebook metrics I will provide, I'll look for whatever I can to prove our contents worth I mean anything. One thing I try to de-prioritize impression numbers with digital advertising. I try to prioritize engagements so click through, likes, loves, shares, you know all of those

L: you know reach on Facebook is a nice beautiful number but it's usually so big and then the other thing is that we use like third party ad serving software to make sure our impressions are actually what we are paying for so we use that for data verification. Cargill has like a big social media content management

platform called SpreadFast and I mean that provides a ton of metrics I mean anything I can get my hands on I need.

T: Do you ever do, Is it just numbers that you are looking for, or do you measure attitudes behaviors,

L: You know that is a good questions. No we don't do like sentiments and all of that but we probably should we just are starting a new media vendor and their supposed to be providing monthly metric stats dashboards some of that stuff needs to be highlighted as well, we should be doing more of that but right now it is primarily numbers, because Cargills is a fairly numbers driven organization and my dream is so we are transitioning to SAP which is like a big computer system and our analytics for sales and everything, funnels into sales force but also a products called Tablo which is like a data visualization software my ultimate goal is that our sales data visualization marries with our advertising and marketing data so if we could feed our facebook and blog data and website data into the same platform as our sales data down to the character manager level and then we can draw some really neat conclusions like real time to notice trends and certain geographys and just be more targeted.

T: How did the metrics that you do gather, how does that go into planning future content?

L: It probably should be used more, one thing I have a problem with is fluency of metrics or like often times we are expected to share metrics with sales members and often times they are like "What's an impression?" What does this mean and you find yourself repeating over and over and over but in terms of for anything paid like if we boost things like on Facebook or if it is digital advertising we probably evaluate that monthly and make changes we probably need to do more in terms of like content types and styles to say here's what was successful last year, we don't do enough of that.

T: How does the content you share contribute to brand recognition, trust, credibility, loyalty, and authenticity in your opinion?

L: Well it's huge I mean without good content. I think yeah it contributes significantly.

T: I know you mentioned before your content really you look to be a valued source of information that leads into your brand recognition and trust.

L: YEah, it's two fold, we want people to see our content and be willing to buy our product but we also want people who already buy our product to feel proud of their purchase, so it is kind of like that like we're supporting, you know like on the sales funnel there is like awareness and then there's evaluating your options and then eventually there's purchase. Well then it's like we kind of have to use content to support after purchase like for people to become brand ambassadors and be proud of the feed they feed their chickens. It helps brand awareness recognition trust but it also helps I think the right term might be brand evangelism. You know it is like that maintenance of your current customers too.

T: Yep, Great so are you concerned about transparency when developing your content and how do you address that if there are concerns.

L: Okay say that again. Like what do you mean by that?

T: So when it comes to putting together your content you talked about the ethical dilemmas that you often face and the responsibility you have to make sure you get it right, so that to me says that there is a little bit of concern about transparency and making sure that you are transparent and so how do you address those concerns with your audience?

L: Well we never if it is something we produce we like to make sure that it is appropriately branded so people aren't mislead. We actually just went through a team training on FTC guidelines for sponsored content. We try to keep ourselves abreast of that and like because you know even doing something like a contest, like a contest like submit a photo and get some free feed, or we will send you free feed for this contest, Cargill is a pretty risk diverse company but we try to not only be ethical but I mean there's, I think there's a lot of people that don't realize the amount of rules that there is about a lot of social media and facebook stuff when you're a brand, Who was it, Lord and Taylor which is like a chain store got in big trouble a couple years ago for sending out this dress to a bunch of fashion bloggers and asking them

to take pictures in that and tag Lord and Taylor but they didn't disclose it was kind of paid and so we also have blogger disclosure forms like anytime, and so obviously with our own page we try to make sure appropriately branded and recognized but if we are partnering with others we try to make sure we are appropriately disclosing relationships and advertisements. Is that kind of what you were asking?

L: I just don't think it pays in the long run for us to be super sneaky and if it's an advertorial we always make sure it says advertisement at the top. Sometimes I feel like these publications because publications have really their budgets and stuff have shrunk over the years they don't really have the staff or experience to always know all these rules, we kind of have to do self policing you know?

T: Do you feel like you're in a situation like that the content you have or the content you are creating would be a valuable way to deal with a crisis? Or to help deal with the crisis?

L: That's a good question I mean backyard chicken, there are not a lot of chicken veterinarians out there and one of the problems is like often the best place to go for poultry advice and technical information is to go into blogs and stuff but like what bothers me is that there's not a journal of backyard chicken methods and there is not universities doing a lot of trials on backyard chickens so a lot of the stuff is first hand experience and I think in the event of a crisis it helps in a crisis yeah it helps our credibility that we have all this content and we have been in the industry a really long time but it totally makes me anxious about accuracy and scientific facts because backyard chicken people will believe anything and I just like ran into a struggle recently because people want chickens for because they eat ticks and I did a bunch research found some scientific reviewed articles and no chickens will eat ticks but not much and they primarily eat adult ticks but it's the nymphal ticks that cause lyme disease so if you're trying to avoid lyme disease by getting chickens like technically the scientific truth isn't there but my coworker basically wanted me to write a blog post about it and take you know the chicken to take credit and I'm like it's not the truth you know?

T: So what is happening?

L: Well we made an infographic on our blog about the topic and I kind of said I basically explained how guinea hens do you know what guinea hens are versus a chicken?

L: Okay, so like they actually up to 70% of their diet are hard shell arthropods which are like insects so they are going to eat a lot more bugs than a chicken because a chicken likes grass and they like feed so for like bug control in general guinea hens are a good choice but there is also something to take into account if you're owning chickens like place your coop away from tall grass wooded areas you know really shaded areas and just different things like if your chicken keeping will help keep the ticks off your chickens and you and I made it more broadly about ticks and brought up the idea of it but I wasn't going to like make the bold statement that yeah chickens help reduce tick populations in your yard because there is not scientific proof there, my coworker was a little annoyed but I was like "We can't back it up why would I say that?" But I think that's because, you know I used to do dairy farming stuff and boy well I used to work at Hoard's Dairyman and if there is not a peer reviewed article behind it, it's crap you know?

T: Right So overall in all the content you have created, what type of content has performed the most successfully for you?

L: Videos, and quizzes

T: and why do you say that?

L: I don't know. I don't know. I mean I'm thinking in terms of engagement and I'm sure maybe there are more people that see our Facebook posts but I mean people engage with videos and they love a quiz. everyone loves a quiz! Everyone loves a little quiz. We are doing a little quiz this fall that is going to be like what kind of hobby farmer are you? And it's going to be so funny. I wrote some of the questions and I am so excited about it like "Are you old McDonalds Farm or are you Green Acres? I'm really excited.

T: does that end up linking back to any of your like is that posted on your website or where do you post those quizzes.

L: Oh excellent we use a platform called wyng and we bought like a corporate subscription but it's like a platform that can execute contests, quizzes, boy just about anything like that it will link back to facebook and if you take it and share it you get like a \$10 coupon.